

F1 Verstappen's big title chance



AUTOSPORT

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8 APRIL 2021

F1 2021

Is Verstappen
ready to end
Hamilton's
F1 reign?

Max on having a faster car,
fighting for the title and
taking on Lewis

'There's nothing
missing now'



PLUS

- Forgotten battles of the F1 greats
- Rosberg's team wins first Extreme E event
- Ferrari protege who became a Mercedes prodigy

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The final question Verstappen needs to answer to be F1 champ

We've known for a long time that Max Verstappen has the speed to challenge for Formula 1 world titles. Now that he seems to have the car, the one question remaining is: can he rein himself in enough when required to avoid throwing points away in a championship fight?

Verstappen has never won a title in car racing but, as he tells Alex Kalinauckas in our frank interview on page 18, he has done so in karting. Not going for every gap can be key. It's clearly something the Dutchman has thought about, and he believes it will be easier to fight for a crown in a competitive car than sniping for wins in a slower one.

One driver who has long since given up on the F1 dream – but does have some serious title successes to his name – is Raffaele Marciello. James Newbold speaks to the Mercedes GT3 ace about where the Italian's single-seater career went wrong and why he is perfectly happy where he is now (p26).

Drivers on their way up used to be able to measure themselves against F1 stars in other categories, and we look back at the time when F2 played host to epic battles between new and established stars on p30.

The ambitious all-electric off-road Extreme E series kicked off last weekend. There were plenty of incidents and issues – and question marks over the visit to Saudi Arabia – but our correspondent Matt Kew judged it a success. Find out why on p38.



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Did Honda have more in the tank for Verstappen in the Bahrain Grand Prix season opener?



HONDA COULD GO AGGRESSIVE

FORMULA 1

Honda will evaluate whether it can be more aggressive with its Formula 1 engine in races following Red Bull's defeat at the hands of Mercedes and Lewis Hamilton in the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix.

Red Bull's clear pace advantage over one lap allowed Max Verstappen to sweep to pole position in qualifying, only for Mercedes to strike back in the race and secure a narrow victory with Hamilton.

Looking back on the race weekend, Red Bull engine supplier Honda said one aspect it will closely analyse is whether it could have been more aggressive with its power deployment. "We will review and consider this data," said Honda F1 technical director Toyoharu Tanabe. "We need to see how much the power unit has been exhausted in this race, and we will then use it according to the characteristics of each circuit in the future. We plan to verify whether this usage was optimal. Basically, I think that it can be used without problems, but I plan to think about what I should do to use it properly in the future."

"It was a disappointing result. But Max was able to compete for the win in the first race of the year, and I think it's a positive thing to see such a performance."

The display from Red Bull in Bahrain bucked the trend of recent seasons, where the team has started slowly and only been able to match Mercedes for performance later in the year. Although the regulation freeze and benefits offered by the high-rake car concept used by Red Bull have played a part, the updated power unit designed by Honda for its final year in F1 has also provided a step forward in performance.

It has given Tanabe confidence that Red Bull can take the fight to Mercedes on a regular basis. "Last year, we were only able to win when everything went well," he said. "In terms of the difference with Mercedes, I think



SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

this year we are in a better position."

Tanabe's belief was shared by the Red Bull-owned teams, with AlphaTauri F1 chief Franz Tost feeling it would be possible to go head to head with the Mercedes-powered cars. "I must say Honda did a fantastic job in Sakura, because this new power unit is much more powerful and better driveable than it was in the past," said Tost, whose driver Pierre Gasly qualified fifth in Bahrain. "I think that Honda is really very, very close to Mercedes. And I can only say thank you to the Japanese engineers, because they did a fantastic job."

The super-compact design of the Honda power unit has also offered Red Bull aerodynamic gains, according to Tanabe: "The camshaft position has been lowered, and we have lowered the engine height. It is a compact package. As a result, when the engine is installed in the chassis, the degree of freedom of the airflow flowing inside the car is increased."

But the power-unit news wasn't all good for Red Bull



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IMAGES

FOR RED BULL

in Bahrain. A problem for Sergio Perez on the formation lap almost prevented him from starting the race, but the Mexican managed to reset his car. Red Bull was also forced to change the control electronics and energy store on Perez's power unit before the race.

Red Bull advisor Helmut Marko stressed to Autosport that he did not have any reliability concerns over Honda's power unit, saying the issues were "primarily software related" and were not a sign of wider problems that could hamper its season. "Perez had a battery changed at the very last moment," said Marko. "That was probably the reason why he was suddenly without power. It was sensationally done by him, putting steering wheel down, all emergency scenarios carried out as if nothing was wrong. Suddenly the power was back. But there's nothing in the hardware. These are all things that can be done with the appropriate adaptations."

Marko heaped praise on Verstappen's Bahrain display despite his late defeat, pondering after the track-limits controversy why the stewards "don't put a wall" at the exit of Turn 4. He also felt the differential issue that blighted Verstappen in the early part of the race was worth around 0.3 seconds per lap, leaving Red Bull "clearly handicapped" in the fight against Hamilton.

Regardless, the display gave Marko hope that come next week's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix at Imola, Red Bull can scrap with Mercedes once again. "With the package we have – a very competitive engine, a chassis that reacts well to everything – we will be back on par with Mercedes," he said. "We know now you can only succeed against Mercedes if you act flawlessly. Everything has to be right. We assume that it will be a similar situation, hopefully with a reversed podium and Max on top."

**LUKE SMITH, JONATHAN NOBLE,
CHRISTIAN NIMMERVOLL AND KEN TANAKA**

Hamilton's 'secret' deal with Prodrive goes public

EXTREME E

It was agreed last summer, but long-time World Rally Championship powerhouse Prodrive has only in the past week disclosed its deal with Lewis Hamilton to run the Mercedes Formula 1 star's X44 team in the inaugural season of Extreme E.

Prodrive founder and chairman David Richards, who attended the maiden Desert X-Prix in Saudi Arabia last weekend, has known the Hamilton family for the better part of 25 years, from when his son used to compete alongside the seven-time world champion in karting. At that time, Prodrive was winning three successive WRC manufacturers' titles for Subaru.

"I've always kept in touch with him, and the families keep in touch," Richards told Autosport. "Lewis actually said, 'I've always wanted to work with you guys at some point in time.'"

The partnership was initiated after Prodrive expressed its interest in entering Extreme E. Series co-founder Alejandro Agag alerted it to Hamilton, who desired a collaboration with an experienced off-road squad.

This tie-up long pre-dates Hamilton's recent amicable split with long-time friend and associate, 1999 British Formula 3

champion Marc Hynes, who previously ran the Project Forty Four business that presides over the Extreme E entry. That set-up is now led by Penni Thow. The Canadian's staggering career includes plucking Justin Bieber from being an amateur performer on YouTube to turning him into one of the biggest music stars on the planet.

The deal with Prodrive also eased Hamilton's bid to sign Sébastien Loeb to X44. The nine-time World Rally champion is contracted to Prodrive through the Bahrain Raid Xtreme BRX1 programme that made its debut on the Dakar Rally earlier this year but ended in retirement.

Loeb's female co-driver Cristina Gutierrez was scouted by Richards after impressing the Motorsport UK chairman during a run on the Andalucia Rally.

When asked why Prodrive had decided to go public with the deal just three days before the opening day of the Extreme E round in AlUla, Richards said: "It was just to clarify things really. There was no strange issue to it. Maybe a bit of ego from our side, that we hadn't been recognised in the relationship. And so we said, 'Let's just clarify the situation that our guys are running the programme.'

MATT KEW

➔ P38 EXTREME E IS GO



Loeb: nine world rally titles, and now a surprise Justin Bieber connection...

IN THE HEADLINES

GUERRIERI IN HYPERCAR

World Touring Car Cup Honda star Esteban Guerrieri has joined the ByKolles sportscar squad as a test and development driver for its new Gibson-powered Le Mans Hypercar. The Argentinian, who contested the 2018 Spa 24 Hours with the JAS Honda team and was runner-up in the 2019 WTCR, has been named alongside team regular Tom Dillmann. The ByKolles, which isn't scheduled to race in this year's WEC, is expected to begin testing imminently.

LE MANS TIMETABLE

The timetable for the rescheduled Le Mans 24 Hours on 21-22 August has been revealed. The test day has been retained for the Sunday before race weekend, while practice and qualifying will be on the Wednesday and Thursday as is tradition. The Hyperpole session that sets the top six places on the grid in each class will take place from 2100-2130 on Thursday. The race will start at 1600 on Saturday.

WITTMANN GETS DTM BMW

News reached us just as we were going to press that two-time DTM champion Marco Wittmann will stay in the series in the first year of its GT3 era. The Bavarian will line up in the Walkenhorst Motorsport BMW M6 GT3, and becomes the third of the Munich marque's factory drivers to be confirmed this season in the DTM, following Rowe Racing pair Timo Glock and Sheldon van der Linde. Wittmann is also racing for Walkenhorst in the GT World Challenge Europe this season.

FERRUCCI BACK AT INDY 500

NASCAR newcomer Santino Ferrucci will return to the Indy 500 this year in a one-off ride with Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. Ferrucci will drive the team's third Honda-powered car alongside two-time and reigning winner Takuma Sato and Graham Rahal. He was due to turn laps of the Brickyard in this week's test.

TEXAS INDYCAR TESTING

Arrow McLaren SP hotshot Pato O'Ward continued his run of IndyCar test-topping performances when the field convened at Texas Motor Speedway last week. Two-time Haas F1 racer Pietro Fittipaldi took to the track after the test to complete his required oval refresher test.

**LMP2 cars hit with power cut****WEC/ELMS**

Engine power in the LMP2 class has been pegged back for a second time ahead of this year's World Endurance Championship to ensure a performance differential to the cars competing at the front of the field in the new Hypercar category.

Power from the one-make Gibson engine has been reduced by 20kW or 25bhp in addition to the 30kw or 40bhp originally planned. That means that the 4.2-litre normally aspirated V8 will push out approximately 535bhp (400kW) in 2021 compared with more than 600bhp (450kW) since the introduction of the current P2 formula in 2017.

A move that also applies to the European and Asian Le Mans Series is part of a revised strategy on the part of the rule makers – WEC promoter the Automobile Club de l'Ouest and the FIA – to push the P2s behind the Le Mans Hypercars and the Signatech Alpine squad's grandfathered LMP1 ORECA design. The LMH rules have been framed with a target race lap time of 3m30s around the 8.47-mile Circuit de la Sarthe at Le Mans, slightly slower than the P2 lap record of 3m27.508s.

The ACO and the FIA had hoped to slow the cars with the original 40bhp reduction in engine power and the move to control tyres supplied by Goodyear. But question marks about the driveability of a new range of harder-compound tyres from Goodyear introduced in pre-season testing have resulted in a revised approach.

The class will now revert to the three specifications of tyre used by Goodyear runners in the 2019-20 WEC, but there

are also two further changes to the configuration of the P2s for 2021. The minimum weight has been increased from 930 to 950kg, and they will have to run in low-downforce Le Mans 24 Hours configuration at all tracks.

The change in aero rules is significant because teams will have to throw away the high-downforce spec parts that they have previously used for all the races bar Le Mans. They have also been given little time to gear up for the new rules: the WEC is scheduled to start at Spa on 1 May and the ELMS at Barcelona on 18 April.

United Autosports boss Richard Dean explained that he would have preferred the original plan to have remained in place.

"Tyres are disposable items, whereas we are now obsoleting our high-downforce aero kits," said Dean (below). "We all know that the end goal is a healthy top category, which is something that United Autosports aspires to go into, but if we'd had a say in it, we might have gone for a bigger grade step down in the tyres rather than things that represent a bigger investment cost."

GARY WATKINS

JEP/MOTORSPORTIMAGES

Lynn joins up with di Resta

LE MANS 24 HOURS

Former Aston Martin driver Alex Lynn will make a return to the prototype ranks at the Le Mans 24 Hours in August after an absence from the category of more than three years. The Briton will take time out from his Mahindra Formula E programme to drive with the United Autosports LMP2 squad alongside Paul di Resta.

The 27-year-old (right), who left Aston at the end of 2020, will drive one of three ORECA-Gibson 07s fielded by United in the centrepiece World Endurance Championship round on 21-22 August. A silver-rated team-mate for Lynn and di Resta, whose return to the squad for Le Mans was announced in early March, has yet to be signed.

Lynn explained that returning to Le

Mans, where he took GTE Pro honours with Aston last year and P2 class pole with G-Drive Racing in 2017, had been on his to-do list for this year.

"Getting back to Le Mans was important and I wanted to be in a prototype, but my priority was to be in a car that has a chance of winning in whatever class, and that's what I've got with United," he said. "It's the perfect opportunity: the team's record speaks for itself."

United boss Richard Dean reckoned that the team is now "two-thirds of the way there to an exceptional line-up". He suggested that Wayne Boyd, who has moved up with United from LMP3 to P2 in the European Le Mans Series for 2021, is a candidate should the team raise additional finance to avoid having to bring in a paying driver.

GARY WATKINS



BAGNALL/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Rookies shine as 2020 almost-champ joins test

FORMULA 3

The FIA Formula 2 drivers had already got their racing season under way in Bahrain, but it wasn't until last weekend that their (mainly) younger brethren in FIA F3 took to the track for the first two-day pre-season official test of 2021 at the Red Bull Ring.

Brazilian Caio Collet (below), the Nicolas Todt-managed Alpine F1 junior who finished runner-up in last season's Formula Renault Eurocup, led the way with Dutch team MP Motorsport, and was the first of three rookies in the overall top four. Perhaps even more impressively, the other two F3 newcomers at the sharp end were 15-year-old American Jak Crawford and 17-year-old Brit Jonny Edgar, the Red Bull Juniors who spent last season fighting each other for the German F4 crown, and who have made a huge leap up the ladder for 2021.

Splitting the youthful quartet was another Red Bull-backed driver, Norwegian Dennis Hauger, who has switched to Prema Powerteam for this season and ended up second.

Times were generally quicker on the second day. On the first, it was ART Grand Prix-run Russian Alexandr Smolyar who was fastest, but he failed to improve on day two. Clement Novalak (Trident) had topped the opening session. The following day, Calan Williams, who is now being overseen by long-time ex-Fortec man and fellow Australian Mick Kouras at Jenzer Motorsport, headed the opening session, which was interrupted by snow.

Intriguingly, Logan Sargeant, pipped to the title in 2020 with Prema, occupied one of the Charouz Racing System seats. The American is short of funds, and it's not impossible that he could race with the Czech-based team. "We're literally assessing options," said

TOP 10 TIMES

POS	DRIVER(TEAM)	TIME
1	Caio Collet (MP)	1m18.592s
2	Dennis Hauger (Prema)	1m18.711s
3	Jak Crawford (Hitech)	1m18.775s
4	Jonny Edgar (Carlin)	1m18.791s
5	Calan Williams (Jenzer)	1m18.836s
6	Matteo Nannini (HWA)	1m18.858s
7	Frederik Vesti (ART)	1m18.880s
8	Clement Novalak (Trident)	1m18.886s
9	Alexandr Smolyar (ART)	1m18.894s
10	Michael Belov (Charouz)	1m18.894s

Harry Soden, his manager at Infinity. "It was to help them with a bit of development on the car. He was in Europe anyway and it worked for both parties – a win-win."

Apart from the standout Edgar, Carlin had reigning British F3 champion Kaylen Frederick on board, with the American's deal for the season announced on the eve of the test. A shuffle at the team has brought two of its triumvirate of F2 brains into the F3 fold. Dutch boffin Stefan de Groot is now technical director across both F2 and F3, while Dan Ticktum's F2 engineer Matt Ogle is on double duty too and is looking after Frederick in F3.

Frederick's deal means just two Charouz seats remain to be filled.

MARCUS SIMMONS



F1 FORMULA 3 MOTORSPORT LIMITED

King and Webster both get Porsche Supercup chance



PORSCHE SUPERCUP

Porsche Carrera Cup GB sensation Harry King will race in the Formula 1-supporting Porsche Supercup this season in addition to attacking a second successive Carrera Cup GB crown. He will partner 2014 Carrera Cup champion Josh Webster at Team Parker Racing as the squad moves into the Supercup in partnership with Revs Motorsport.

King stormed to the Carrera Cup crown as a rookie last season, the first of his two years as a Porsche GB Junior. He had long eyed progressing into the Supercup for 2021, and he will benefit from working with the same engineers

across both series. In the Supercup he will have to get to grips with the new-for-2021 Type 992 car, which is introduced to the Carrera Cup GB next year.

"I'm delighted to be competing in the Porsche Supercup," said King. "It's something I've been wanting to achieve since becoming a Porsche Junior driver and is the logical step towards progressing in my career and I feel ready for it. Hopping from two models of Porsche Cup cars will pose challenges, but it's something I know I can manage."

At present, there are two early-season clashes between the Supercup and Carrera Cup where King (left of pic) is

set to race in the domestic series, so he is unsure of what he can achieve in the Supercup. "My goal is obviously to be at the front," he said. "Whether it takes a few rounds or a full season, I know we'll definitely find our feet. I understand the high level of competition in the championship, so it won't be easy."

Webster, runner-up to King in last year's Carrera Cup, returns to the Supercup for the first time since 2018. "It will be my third full Supercup season so I will be aiming to use all of my experience, especially on tracks where we don't have much testing, to gain the upper hand," he said.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Legge steps up to WEC as Hawkey joins 'Dames'



HONN/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

WEC/ELMS

Sportscar stalwart Katherine Legge has moved up into the World Endurance Championship line-up of the Iron Lynx Ferrari squad. And as part of a reshuffle of the team's all-female 'Iron Dames' programme, Porsche Carrera Cup GB regular Esmee Hawkey (right) has been given her international break in the European Le Mans Series.

Legge will race alongside Rahel Frey and Manuela Gostner in the 'Iron Dames' GTE Am class Ferrari 488 GTE Evo in the WEC. She has swapped places with Michelle Gatting, who moves into the ELMS line-up alongside Frey and bronze driver Hawkey. Gostner had been due to race in the ELMS as the mandatory bronze, but will now race in the Le Mans Cup support series alongside Renault Clio Cup

France graduate Doriane Pin.

"Katherine has some clashes with IMSA [where she is racing with Team Hardpoint EBM in GT Daytona] and we wanted to put together the most competitive line-ups possible," said team boss Andrea Piccini. "We tested Esmee at Paul Ricard last month and we were very happy with her performance and her approach."

GARY WATKINS

Incredible run for ‘The Giz’

BATHURST

Shane van Gisbergen has become the second driver in history to win the Bathurst Triple Crown by taking victory in last weekend’s Bathurst 6 Hour in a BMW M4.

The Kiwi teamed up with Shane Smollen and Rob Rubis to win the production car classic (right), despite copping a five-second penalty for a restart breach midway through the race. That proved to be little trouble for van Gisbergen, who helped his car to a whopping 12s margin by the chequered flag. The victory comes after his Bathurst 12 Hour win in 2016 and his Bathurst 1000 triumph last year.

The other Triple Crown winner is Paul Morris, who won the Bathurst 12 Hour when it was still a production car race in 2007, followed by the Bathurst 1000 in 2014 (he also finished first on the road in that race in 1997, only to be excluded) and the Bathurst 6 Hour in 2017.

Van Gisbergen’s latest win adds to a stunning streak of success that goes back to the end of last season. He is unbeaten in Supercars since last October’s Bathurst 1000 season finale, and has scooped all five race wins so far in 2021. He also won all three races, including the New Zealand Grand Prix climax, as a wildcard entrant in the opening round of the Toyota Racing



NATHAN WONG/BATHURST 6 HOUR

Series on a return to single-seaters.

Added to that, he performed double duty last weekend to take victory at Bathurst in the first race of the GT World Challenge Australia double-header at the wheel of a Mercedes-AMG GT3 shared with Malaysian prince Jeffri Ibrahim. Van Gisbergen (right) led throughout the opening stint of race two, only for Ibrahim to be denied honours on the final lap by a lunge at Forrest Elbow from Yasser Shahin, who shared his Audi R8 LMS with Garth Tander. That second place is his worst result since he finished fifth in a Supercars race at The Bend – a track owned by Shahin’s family – last September.

Remarkably, 2016 Blancpain Endurance Series champion van Gisbergen has won



GT WORLD CHALLENGE AUSTRALIA

three Supercars races, the GT race and the 6 Hour while recovering from a broken collarbone and three broken ribs sustained in a cycling shunt. “I’ll be sore tomorrow but it’s well worth it,” he said.

ANDREW VAN LEEUWEN



F4 ace Stevenson to race in Europe

EUROFORMULA OPEN

British Formula 4 ace Casper Stevenson is to step up to Euroformula Open this season with Van Amersfoort Racing.

The 17-year-old, who was an F4 title contender in 2020 and finished third in the points, has become the first driver named for the Dutch squad’s EFO line-up, which uses HWA engines. Stevenson tested Formula Renault Eurocup

machinery last December prior to that series’ merger with Formula Regional, and also raced in the Regional F3 Tatuus chassis in some Asian F3 rounds this year, before opting for the Dallara 320 EFO car.

“It’s exciting to be stepping up to the F3 level, especially with a team as successful as Van Amersfoort Racing,” said Stevenson. “As many of the tracks are new to me, I have a lot to learn. I’m adapting well

though and I feel very confident.”

Elsewhere on the EFO grid, Malaysian Nazim Azman has joined fellow British F3 graduate Louis Foster with the Motopark-affiliated CryptoTower Racing team. Red Bull Junior Jak Crawford has added an EFO programme to his FIA Formula 3 campaign with the Motopark team proper, in the same way as Yuki Tsunoda and Liam Lawson did in 2019.

MARCUS SIMMONS

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Mercedes misses FE Gen3 deadline

FORMULA E

Mercedes has gone against expectation by delaying its commitment to Formula E. It has missed the 31 March deadline to register for the Gen3 regulations, citing a need for "clarification" concerning the structure of the championship.

Only two races into its second season as a works entry, Mercedes is still expected to pledge its future to the championship until at least the 2025-26 season. Plans are in place for the race team to consolidate in Brackley for next year and move away from its current set-up that spans five locations.

Team principal Ian James said: "While recent discussions relating to key topics such as the implementations of a cost cap for Formula E have been largely positive, there are still important details regarding the structure of the series which are in clarification. For this reason, the decision



has been taken to delay our registration to enable these points to be finalised."

The elapsed 31 March cut-off developed into a soft deadline, meaning Formula E will still accept manufacturers, but they are expected to get delayed access to FIA data from parts suppliers Spark Racing Technology, Williams Advanced Engineering and Hankook.

As it stands, Mahindra, DS Automobiles, Nissan and Porsche are all committed to Gen3, while NIO 333 and Dragon Penske Autosport's signatures are expected.

A source high up in the championship has confirmed to Autosport that, contrary to some reports, Jaguar has agreed its terms but has opted to hold off its public announcement.

Meanwhile, the pandemic has dealt the latest blow for the Nissan e.dams team. A lasting delay in parts supply means the team will no longer be able to debut its new 2021 powertrain this weekend in Rome, the first race to take place after the revised 5 April homologation window. It could bring in the new car for the Valencia double-header across 24-25 April, but Monaco on 8 May seems more likely.

A Nissan statement read: "With the agreement of the FIA, we have rescheduled the debut of the new Nissan e.dams Gen2 Formula E powertrain due to a COVID-related delay of parts."

MATT KEW



Rowland and Buemi
have to wait for
new powertrain

Middleton 'marries' into Imperiale family

ITALIAN GT

Stuart Middleton, the 2017 British GT4 co-champion, is to step up to GT3 competition this season in Italy with Lamborghini team Imperiale Racing.

Middleton has become an ace in the marque's Super Trofeo contests over the past two seasons. He came close to winning the European title in 2019, and was fourth in the North American series last year.

The Northumbrian will now share a Huracan GT3 Evo with

2016 Asian GT champion Andrea Amici and Alberto di Folco in the Italian GT Endurance Championship, which kicks off at Sicilian speedbowl Enna-Pergusa on 22-23 May.

"Pretty much every year so far in my racing we've done something new or different," said Middleton, who has relocated to Italy. "I've had to learn a new car or working with a new team, new tracks, new country. This year we can add learning a new language to that!"



IN THE HEADLINES



Alesi to fill in for Nakajima

SUPER FORMULA

Giuliano Alesi, son of Ferrari Formula 1 folk hero Jean, will race for TOM'S in Super Formula this season as a substitute for Kazuki Nakajima, but admits he "doesn't know what to expect" from his debut.

Alesi has moved to Japan for 2021 after two seasons in Formula 2, and has embarked on a dual campaign in the second-tier Super Formula Lights series with TOM'S and in Super GT's GT300 class with Toyota Team Thailand.

With Nakajima set to miss multiple races due to clashing FIA World Endurance Championship commitments for Toyota and travel restrictions, Alesi looks set for an early debut in Super Formula, potentially as early as this month's second round at Suzuka.

"The objective will be to score some points, get a podium if I can," said Alesi. "But since I have never raced in Super Formula I don't know what to expect, so it's a little bit too early [to aim] for that."

Alesi first drove the SF19 last month in Suzuka pre-season testing in place of

Nakajima, setting the fifth fastest time on the second day. "It felt really quick," he said. "Downforce, tyres, engine, everything. It's completely different to what I'm used to. When I was driving it, it felt really close to an F1 car. Much faster than F2."

Alesi's main campaign in Super Formula Lights kicked off last weekend at Fuji (above), where his TOM'S team-mate, Toyota protege Kazuto Kotaka, stood in for the quarantining Kamui Kobayashi at the KCMG Super Formula squad.

Alesi scored two thirds and a sixth on his Japanese competition debut. The first race went to ex-FIA F3 racer Teppei Natori (B-Max Racing Team), the second to Honda youngster Ren Sato (Toda Racing), and the wet finale to another Honda prospect, Atsushi Miyake (Looney Sports). Alesi therefore sits fourth in the points.

The 21-year-old Alesi says he doesn't view the move to F3 level as a backwards step in his career because he no longer harbours any realistic ambitions of racing in F1. "This is not for one or two years, I want to build my career here," he said.

JAMIE KLEIN

HADJAR ON TOP AT RICARD

The final instalment of the trio of two-day pre-season Formula Regional European by Alpine tests played out at Paul Ricard last week, with French F4 graduate Isack Hadjar topping the times for R-ace GP. He headed ART Grand Prix's Gregoire Saucy by 0.011 seconds. The duo headed two sessions apiece, sharing the fastest time in one of them. R-ace brace Hadrien David and Zane Maloney were next, from Arden pair William Alatalo and Alex Quinn. The other session was topped by Prema Powerteam's David Vidales, but the Italian powerhouse has otherwise kept its powder dry over testing.

SYMMONS DELAYED

This weekend's planned Australian Supercars round at Symmons Plains has been pushed back a week to 17-18 April. That's because a COVID-19 outbreak in Queensland has caused a lockdown in the Brisbane region, and Tasmania – where Symmons Plains is located – is not admitting incomers direct from Queensland. The state's teams are therefore spending time travelling through New South Wales, but will be clear by the following week.

AHMED TRIES US ROUTE

The nomadic career of Enaam Ahmed looks set to take another turn this year. The 2017 British F3 champion took part in this week's Indy Pro 2000 official test at Barber Motorsports Park with RP Motorsport, and could join the squad for the IndyCar-supporting series alongside fellow ex-FIA F3 racer Enzo Fittipaldi.

NEATE LOOKS TIDY

The 14-year-old son of British Touring Car Championship regular Andy Neate made a strong car-racing debut in French F4 last weekend. Aiden Neate scored two fourths and a fifth at Nogaro and is third in the points.

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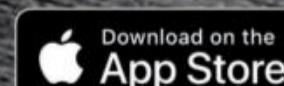
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F1 2021's crucial calls

It's great having the fastest car, as Red Bull knows. But a closely fought battle can be decided by other factors, as Mercedes demonstrated in Bahrain

ALEX KALINAUKAS

“We just have to make sure we have a faster car,” Max Verstappen tells us in this issue (see page 18). In essence, the Red Bull driver is correct – having the fastest car on the grid will make any team the favourite to win races and titles. But things are rarely as simple as that in Formula 1.

The championship is only two weeks on from a thrilling season opener in Bahrain, but it was Mercedes and Lewis Hamilton who triumphed, not Red Bull and Verstappen, who at least confirmed they have produced the fastest car of 2021 so far. This advantage will be much harder to unpick than in a conventional campaign, with the development rules more restricted. But that equally does not mean that Mercedes can't tweak its package or improve performance, and the same is true of Red Bull.

What made the Bahrain race so spectacular was the tense way in which proceedings played out, plus Hamilton and Verstappen going wheel to wheel for the victory. And this is where the accuracy of Verstappen's comments on Red Bull simply needing to have the fastest car to succeed ends. As he will undoubtedly be aware, that element is just the biggest and most important factor that will likely decide the destination of the 2021 title, but there are other critical calls that may also make the difference.

Hamilton has proved that a slower package can still win the day, and the way things worked out in Bahrain immediately brought to

“Strategy calls and team operational attitude can make or break races and championships”

mind the most recent F1 season to have a multi-team scrap for the title: 2012. Back then, Fernando Alonso took an inferior Ferrari package (arguably only fourth fastest) to the brink of the title against Sebastian Vettel's Red Bull. There has only been one race so far in 2021, but the Bahrain spectacle has raised hopes of a closely fought campaign, along the lines of what F1 enjoyed nine years ago. In the race's aftermath, there was a sense from within Mercedes that its 103rd F1 win since the start of 2014 really was a shock result.

“It was one of the most thrilling, nailbiting, sort of chest-bursting experiences that I have ever had at a race track,” Mercedes technical director James Allison says of the final stages of the season opener. But the seeds of that victory were sown much earlier in the weekend, with Mercedes having a crucial advantage in the extra set of hard tyres for both of its cars heading into the

race. Although this was not an overwhelming factor in the final result, the hard tyre played a role in the outcome of the aggressive and successful strategy that Mercedes deployed – a two-stopper that required Hamilton to produce another tyre-management masterclass on a long final stint. But that result still required Verstappen to make a critical, if minor, mistake during what would be his sole passing attempt to regain the lead of the race.

Verstappen now knows he must be perfect if he is to succeed in the close-fought battle many F1 observers believe is a realistic possibility for the new season. But by already having the advantage with the RB16B's pace compared to the W12, this remains less critical to Red Bull. Mercedes knows that it now needs to make the perfect strategy calls, have nothing go wrong operationally, and seize the fluctuating factor of fortune that live sport creates.

As an illustration of this, had Valtteri Bottas's second pitstop not gone wrong during the Bahrain race, then Hamilton would likely have been less reliant on Verstappen's snap-oversteer-induced late slip off the road. Mercedes' attempts to use the undercut power with both its cars would have forced Red Bull to at least consider lengthening Verstappen's final stint on the hards, when Mercedes observed it had “shown some nervousness”, according to Allison, about doing that earlier in the race. But a slight-yet-costly wheelgun misalignment on Bottas's right-front made all of this immaterial.

Red Bull has excellent form in making close strategy calls work in its favour. It thought it had an ace on its hands with Verstappen starting on mediums compared to Bottas's softs in the 2020 season opener, and it did succeed in beating Mercedes in the 70th Anniversary GP last summer by having Verstappen start on the hard tyres compared to the mediums on the Black Arrows. At that stage of last season, Mercedes' pace advantage remained massive.

Operationally, it's worth remembering the incredible repair job Red Bull pulled off to fix Verstappen's front suspension after he crashed before last season's Hungarian GP. It's a compelling example of what this squad can do under great pressure.

That's what is really going to make the difference if the 2021 season plays out as expected. Strategy calls and team operational attitude may rank below the fundamental factor of having a faster car, but they can still make or break races and championships.

Mercedes has already shown it can quickly pivot to deploying aggressive tactics as the chaser, while Red Bull demonstrated the inner confidence required to pull off strategies that require perfect execution to be successful. These differing approaches made the Bahrain race a complex affair, and it could be just the start of many tight, technical battles to come this year.

→ P18 MAX VERSTAPPEN INTERVIEW



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Speeding to save trees

The Austrian archduke should make a splash on his move into the WEC and ELMS for his on-track form, and for helping to save a South American forest

FERDINAND HABSBURG

Racing is something I've been doing intensely for the past 12 years since I started karting when I was 11. This year, I've moved from the DTM into LMP2, and will be racing in the European Le Mans Series with Algarve Pro Racing alongside Richard Bradley and Diego Menchaca, and in the FIA World Endurance Championship with WRT alongside Robin Frijns and Charles Milesi.

Now that I'm racing all over the world, I've noticed the waste that we produce and leave behind. Over the winter I was trying to find a way in which I could become more aware, more sustainable. I wanted to have not only the benefit of being very passionate about our sport, but also try to change the wasteful nature that the sport has.

So I started this campaign called Drive Fast, Act Faster. It was helped out a lot by me joining Algarve Pro Racing for the ELMS, because Stewart Cox the team owner is very motivated by this kind of energy. And he basically told me, 'Ferdinand, you can have the car livery however you want, you can have free rein and you can make changes, as long as you're the one who puts in all the effort,' because obviously he's extremely busy getting all the cars ready, and the number-one priority is still to win races.

I've implemented a few changes at the team to reduce our waste, changes that anybody can do, and found a system that

"I'm privileged to be racing in a 4.2-litre V8 LMP2 car, which makes a proper noise"

anybody can very easily offset all of the carbon emissions that we still put out. But then I didn't want it just to be me. I wanted to create a statement from the racing community and see how it took off, and that's what Drive Fast, Act Faster is about.

I'm trying to connect all the teams, all the drivers we can get together, and collectively protect a specific forest that I've grown very fond of in Ecuador. It's called the Narupa Reserve, and it's the forest that you'll see on the livery of my car. It's the most biodiverse forest on the planet, and that includes flora and fauna. It's extremely dense, and I thought, 'Why don't we have this forest protected by a racing championship?' Each team or each car that partakes in this protects 10 to 15 acres of this forest, including our car obviously.

We've got other projects, like trying to use more sustainable

materials for team kit – all the team kit we're using is made out of upcycled plastics. Then all the team kit that I've been designing and working on, all of the excess from that will be turned into merchandise, which will then be sold online through my website, and 100% of the proceeds will go also to the Narupa Reserve. This is my attempt to bring the fans into the emotion of trying to protect this forest, so it's not just those of us who are racing who are taking part in this campaign.

Using scientific evidence of how much CO₂ gets eaten up by the Narupa Reserve, we know that one acre can store up to 40 tons of CO₂. Therefore, to protect three or four acres would be more than enough to offset my ELMS campaign. However, we are protecting 10 acres, and in the WEC it's 15. The point here is to protect as much rainforest as possible, to go beyond merely offsetting our carbon footprint and to really make change. Those acres that we want to protect are currently mainly in the ownership of deforestation companies.

Green Future Project are the people who I'm working with. They are working with a local NGO called Foundation Jocotoco, which then goes to the deforestation companies, cattle breeders and private farmers to buy the land and integrate it in the reserve. So instead of the deforestation company going there a month later to take away all of the forest, it stays there.

I'm privileged to be racing in a 4.2-litre V8 LMP2 car, which makes a proper noise. You can see the trend of championships moving away from that, and if that trend were to continue I'd be worried that one day in the near future it would start having a large effect on our motorsport, and my children and my children's children might not have the opportunity to see V8s, let alone V10s, racing head to head around a race track in an intense battle with top-class drivers. And I would be very sad to see that happen. For each race weekend that I have in ELMS and WEC, I'm targeting two or three teams and drivers who I believe might possibly have an interest, so I'll be trying to expand the campaign and get people involved.

We shouldn't feel uncomfortable about motorsport. We should be aware of the benefits we have from the sport, and try to outweigh the negatives that we do produce. That's why I'm trying to get as many people as I can onto this, because imagine if we are truly able to protect one of the most valuable forests on the planet, just by our racing community. It would be such a huge achievement, and only because of our passion for our sport. So the more I try to get this out there, the more we reach people and get them involved, the cooler the sport will become for those of us who are conscious and are aware. 

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YOUR SAY

Endless repetition, pointless speculation and then, when it came to the sharp end, 20 seconds of actual racing

PHIL OAKES

Not feeling the spark for Extreme E

Following much anticipation, I tuned in to the inaugural Extreme E event. I am afraid to say coverage highlighted everything that has been wrong with live event broadcasting for the past 20 years, over-hyped and over-long. Endless repetition, pointless speculation and then, when it came to the sharp end, 20 seconds of actual racing.

People used to criticise 1990s Formula 1 for being all about the start, but at least there was a vague chance of something changing during the race. If the organisers want to effect real change in awareness, they have to attract an audience. On last weekend's showing, I can't see that happening. The format needs to change, and quickly, so the broadcast coverage can be condensed.

I cannot conceive that all but a few dyed in the wool petrolheads (the irony is intentional) would sit through seven hours of coverage for what amounted to four 20-second bursts of actual competition.

PhilOakes
Portishead, North Somerset

Will sprint races risk skewing a whole season?

What if a crash similar to Romain Grosjean's in Bahrain last year were to happen in a Saturday sprint race? And it involving a championship contender? Would we really want the outcome of a whole season skewed by such a happening? Then, also remembering how 'crashgate' did affect the 2008 final standings...

Graeme Innes-Johnstone
Elland, West Yorks

Give Bottas a break

Really starting to be sick and tired that Valtteri Bottas (right) is being blamed for everything – all the time. Now Chief Editor Kevin Turner blames him for taking the fastest lap with new tyres (Leader column, 1 April). Never saw these writings when Lewis Hamilton or someone else does that. It's all legal.

And why wasn't he in the victory fight? Because he was

having a coffee break while Merc messed it up for him – again. Would love to see a bit more fair writings from Autosport.

Cheers from Finland.

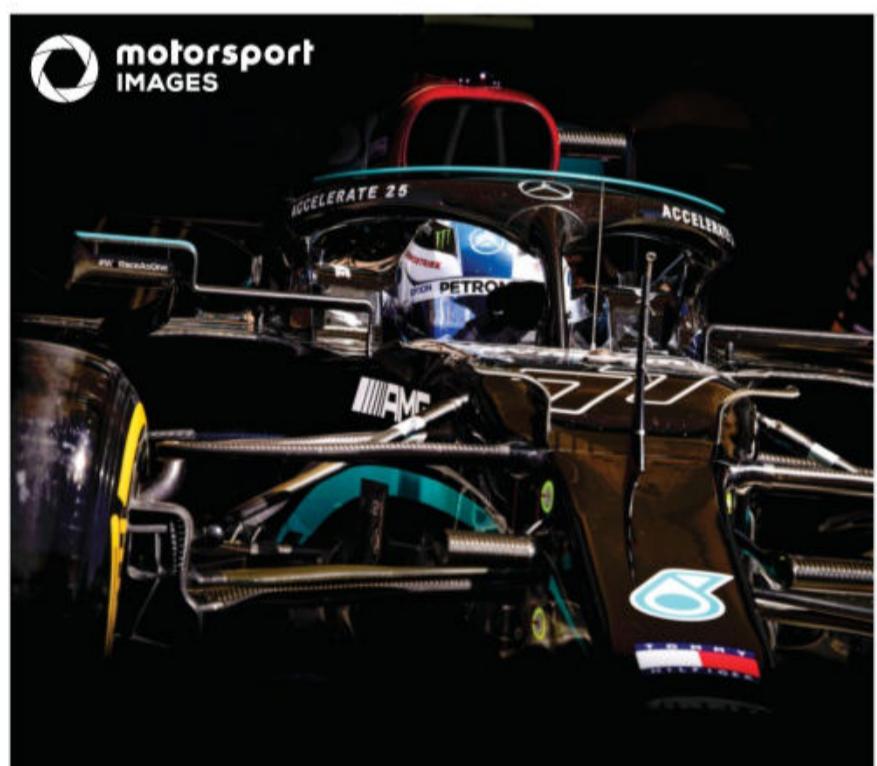
Ari Jakobson
Espoo, Finland

Our point about Bottas wasn't that he did anything untoward, more that the way he was able to post fastest lap wasn't in the original spirit of the regulations, even though it's perfectly legal – ed

It's worth repeating...

Please, please, please can commentators repeat what the drivers say on their pit radios during a race as it is very difficult to hear and very frustrating when they respond, without us knowing what was said in the first place?

Geraldine Pickthall
Bromley, Kent



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REDBULL



IS MAX APPEN READY TO WIN THE ULTIMATE F1 PRIZE?

ALEX KALINAUKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport
IMAGES

The Zoom ID suddenly changes. There's to be no doubt whose time and attention is coming Autosport's way. A few minutes past the agreed start point – this is a Formula 1 driver's time and attention, after all – the camera comes back on. It's still Red Bull's press attache in view, but then our perspective turns.

Here's Max Verstappen. He's sitting in the spartanly decorated room that will be his driver's quarters over the Bahrain Grand Prix weekend – over his shoulder, halfway through our chat, his father Jos will appear through the door and peer intently at the screen into which his son is communicating. Media engagements are part of the motorsport game, but this one feels palpably different. Throughout, there's a sense of mixed excitement, potential, even destiny – appropriate given Verstappen's rapid career rise, even if the term is a touch cliched.

Such is the way of things now that we're speaking to Verstappen online – the only way to get real long-form time with F1 drivers within the COVID-19 restrictions. But it's the timing that's the important difference. We're speaking just as the Bahrain GP pre-event media day is getting under way, so no one knows for sure how the 2021 pecking order will shape up. But the testing formbook – as the rest of the weekend's events make clear – is accurate. Red Bull has F1's fastest car.

That's the different feeling. And it comes from every corner of the team. Only a month ago, Christian Horner was telling Autosport that his squad would "not give up in our hunt for a fifth title" – a quiet confidence made clear. Now it's Verstappen's turn. And because of the different aura surrounding Red Bull in 2021, the question topics reflect his season's growing potential.

Only two days after we speak, Verstappen will put Red Bull on pole for the season opener by 0.388 seconds over Lewis Hamilton. That's an enormous gap, which may have been approaching half a second had Verstappen not gone too wide exiting Turn 2 on his opening Q1 run and damaged his floor, which cost the Dutchman approximately 0.1s per lap for the rest of his qualifying efforts. In



Bahrain 2021:
a less familiar role
for Verstappen – the
chased, rather than
the chaser



the race the following day, Verstappen proves that Red Bull has the pace to beat Mercedes, leading from the off and then fighting back to the front once the Black Arrows' aggressive strategy calls take Hamilton into the lead after the race's first third. Only his botched attempt to retake first place – which turns out to be his sole opportunity – costs Verstappen a famous win.

Now that Red Bull has been established as F1's 2021 benchmark, and Verstappen's place as the team's lead driver is so far clearly untouched by Sergio Perez's arrival in place of Alex Albon, things will become more about the team's lead driver making the difference to the season's outcome. Particularly in this year,

"ONCE YOU ARE IN THAT POSITION WITH HAVING A CAR TO FIGHT FOR THE TITLE, EVERYTHING BECOMES A LOT EASIER"

where teams will struggle to make major pecking order advances thanks to the development restrictions (as well as the need to direct ever more resources towards the new rules arriving in 2022), it will be down to individual choices at key moments.

With his 10 F1 wins during Mercedes' years of dominance, Verstappen has firmly demonstrated that he can succeed on the occasions when big risks are less off-putting because they don't jeopardise a non-existent title fight if they go wrong. But what about being the chased rather than the chaser? Does Verstappen have what it takes to leave the feisty opportunist behind if it means making certain of the regular, but perhaps lower, points payouts that title-winning campaigns require? Predictably, he's unequivocal.

"Once you are in that position with having a car to fight for the title, everything becomes a lot easier anyway," he says. "Of course, there's pressure to win a championship, because you're fighting other people. But, overall, I think it's a much better situation to



Bahrain pace points
to season-long battle

be in, than always just not. Because then you have to take a lot more risks all the time to try and get a good result. And you have to risk it a bit more in lap one or a certain area in the race. Then, mistakes can happen.

"So, I'm just looking forward and hoping of course that I have a car to be in a championship fight, because that's where I think I am even better. Then it's a lot nicer and a lot easier to deal with."

It's intriguing to put this question to Verstappen, precisely because of his extraordinary career so far. After making such a splash during his sole season racing in European Formula 3 in 2014, where he finished third in a championship won by Esteban Ocon, Verstappen's instant promotion into F1 means he does not have a championship title in car racing.

But he was ultra-successful in karting, winning the 2013 World KZ championship among a host of other accolades at that level. This, he says, explains why he's unfazed by the ➤



Red Bull star
concedes Turkey
2020 was a standout
performance by
Hamilton



potential glory awaiting him in 2021. We wonder what, if anything, does faze the 23-year-old...

"It's very different [being in a title fight]," says Verstappen. "Of course, that scenario, you don't need to win every single battle or race. But that's a natural thing. It doesn't mean that because I didn't win a title, for example, that I don't understand that. Because I won many titles in go-karting and it's basically the same – you choose your battles. Also, I only had one attempt of winning a title in F3, and of course, yeah, it didn't happen."

But the right mindset and approach necessary to win a championship will likely be critical to the final destination of this year's title. Verstappen is taking on the joint-best driver in F1 history in terms of championship success, one who has more race victories than any other. Hamilton has made it his business to rack up titles for Mercedes. He knows exactly how to play a campaign perfectly, whether it's not panicking after a slow start (not that this applies in 2021, with his Bahrain GP victory his third F1 season-opening win in 15 career attempts), riding momentum waves as other teams come to the front before fading away, or taking his chances when another squad has the edge, such as in 2018.

Since 2014, Hamilton has established himself as F1's megastar. Nico Rosberg retired after giving all he had just to defeat Hamilton once over the course of a season, an accomplishment that appears all the more remarkable as years pass. Valtteri Bottas is yet to show he can get anywhere near besting Hamilton as Rosberg did, even if he is a rapid driver in his own right. Sebastian Vettel and Fernando Alonso came up short for Ferrari, with the Spaniard's new start at Alpine unlikely to bring him back into the leading fight until 2022 at the earliest (and the same can be said for Vettel joining Aston Martin). Charles Leclerc is at the mercy of Ferrari's car deficiencies. Only Verstappen has the pace and package to take on F1's incumbent star.

And that's why Red Bull's testing and Bahrain pace sent F1

interest levels soaring. It matters little to outside observers whether it's the team's impressive 2020 development work and off-season efforts to cure the RB16's unpredictable handling, or Mercedes' downforce losses from the changes to the rear floors being greater because of its low-rake aerodynamic concept, that has resulted in a genuine multi-team scrap at the front of the grid. To many, having two leading driving talents engaging in a battle for the ages is what counts. After all, there's a reason why 2012 springs so easily to mind, despite the near decade that has passed since that season...

The respect between Verstappen and Hamilton is clear. Autosport seems to somewhat disarm Verstappen when we ask: "Other than

**"YOU HAVE TO GIVE CREDIT TO LEWIS.
BUT THERE ARE A LOT OF OTHERS WHO
WOULD HAVE BEEN GOOD IN THAT CAR"**

yourself, who is the best driver in F1?" But his answer is telling in the context of the title fight that seems to be unfolding in 2021.

"Man," he says after a moment of reflection, "you know it's super-hard, but of course you have to give credit to Lewis – the way he has dealt with all the years, to always come back and be honoured and win that amount of races and championships. You definitely cannot go around Lewis."

"But, of course, there are still a lot of other people in F1 who are very good, very strong, and would have been very good in that car as well. But still, of course, the way Lewis has won and also sometimes in tricky races. Like last year in Turkey. To win that race, I think he did very well. Yeah, definitely, he is one of the best ever in F1."

Hamilton has long claimed that he would welcome a greater challenge at the front of the grid, particularly from the up-and-



COATES



Verstappen turned tables on Mercedes with stunning 70th Anniversary GP victory

coming drivers at rival squads. There's a discernible sense that the 36-year-old is well aware that he must continue raising his game if he is to stay ahead. Get complacent for even a moment, and Hamilton knows Verstappen and co will pounce.

Consider the 2020 70th Anniversary GP. Mercedes had utterly dominated the previous weekend's British GP, despite the late-race tyre dramas making it appear a closer event than it was. But the second time around, the one-step-softer tyre compounds exposed a slight weakness in the Black Arrows, which Verstappen exploited to take a stunning victory just five races into a season that some had suggested Mercedes could whitewash, such was the W11's early-season pace advantage. And he did it so calmly, so emphatically, his late radio messages to engineer Gianpiero Lambiase evidence of a top-class driver excelling on a day where they knew they were the best.

Speaking in the aftermath of his Bahrain win, Hamilton said he was "super-excited and super-happy for the fans" keyed up by the prospect of a year-long fight against Verstappen in 2021. "It's something the fans have wanted for a long time," he continued. "Of course, this is only one race, so we don't know what the future holds

in terms of [the rest of the season's results.] With the pace they have, they could be ahead a lot more, but we're going to work as hard as we can to try and stay close in this battle, and I hope for many more of these sorts of races with Max and Valtteri. There's a long way to go – 22 [races]. Holy crap! I'll be grey by the end of this!"

Although this may be reading too much into Hamilton's words at this stage, they appear to contain the barest suggestion of mind games. By acknowledging the clear pace gap Red Bull enjoys over Mercedes on the evidence of the season opener – and it would be wise to point out again that one race provides a very small data set at a track that can be considered an outlier thanks to its abrasive surface and windy setting – Hamilton

could be trying to put early pressure on his rival.

After all, as well as claiming consistent points with reduced risk-taking, successful title campaigns generally don't contain a series of driver errors. So it's interesting that Verstappen highlights Hamilton's 2020 Turkish GP win as a standout, because in that event the Red Bull racer made a critical mistake, half-spinning while overtaking the Racing Point of Perez, just when his own impressive win was a real possibility. And the 2021 Bahrain race also contained a significant Verstappen error, even if it was a minor one in the moment. His slip off the road catching an oversteer snap as he went side by side with Hamilton at the Sakhir track's controversial Turn 4 right-hander cost Verstappen his only chance to reclaim the lead.

But perhaps this will benefit Verstappen in the long run. And this theory comes from Hamilton, who also said in the race's aftermath: "We were fortunate today with Max going wide in Turn 4, but that won't happen again."

Verstappen has already proved that he can adapt his approach after making errors – most famously after his run of mistakes in early 2018, after which he delivered a string of exceptional ➤

performances. That turnaround showed that the glare of the spotlight doesn't hold him back, but that sensation is only set to intensify if the title fight pans out as many expect. Simply put, Verstappen needs to show he can cut out the minor errors to avoid losing another race where Red Bull has the edge, especially when he's taking on a driver who has proved he can win with a slower car.

"You get more and more experience, so everything naturally becomes a bit easier," he says when asked if he feels more complete as an F1 driver, compared to his sensational debut victory for Red Bull (after 23 races for Toro Rosso) in the 2016 Spanish GP. "You get more understanding of the car, and especially when you stay with the same team, how everything works within the team. And myself as a person, of course you grow – that's natural, just becoming older. But in general, I think I'm still the same person."

[Becoming a more complete driver] is just general understanding of F1 and the F1 car itself within the team. Your driving, handling certain situations – if that's a race start, or lap one or looking after tyres. And that's just a very normal thing. Because when you are in your first year in F1, compared to whatever – year six/seven – naturally you become a better driver."

Verstappen was in a unique position for much of 2020, as the only driver able to live with the relentless and stunningly high pace the W11 pilots could reach. Race after race he qualified or finished third, usually gamely hanging on to the rear of one or both of the Mercedes.

But, despite having seen up close what Hamilton does to gain an edge – against outside rivals or his intra-team competition from Bottas – Verstappen's approach is not to follow another's example. It's worth remembering his age, 23, when reading the iron-clad certainty of his words.

"No, I don't look at it like that," he says. "I first look at what I could have done better or different – after every single race. I do watch other people and review stuff, but I am not someone who copies. I'm myself. Because if you copy stuff from others, you're always going to be behind – first of all because you're not innovating and becoming better than them. Of course, you can just look at it, you can observe it. But at the end of the day, I'm myself and I think that works the best for me."

Red Bull needs that inner steel Verstappen possesses. The team's decision to hire Perez after two years of failing to adequately duplicate Daniel Ricciardo's results in its other car was surely an acknowledgement that its driver line-up was unbalanced, and therefore weaker overall compared to Mercedes'. But even if Perez does prove to be a significant upgrade on Albon or Pierre Gasly (his tumultuous Bahrain weekend means there is still no conclusive evidence of this, with the Mexican also suggesting it will take him five races to be fully settled in), Red Bull still needs Verstappen to

VERSTAPPEN IN F1			
YEAR	TEAM	POINTS (POS)	WINS
2015	Toro Rosso	49 (12th)	0
2016	Toro Rosso/Red Bull	204 (5th)	1
2017	Red Bull	168 (6th)	2
2018	Red Bull	249 (4th)	2
2019	Red Bull	278 (3rd)	3
2020	Red Bull	214 (3rd)	2

ETHERINGTON

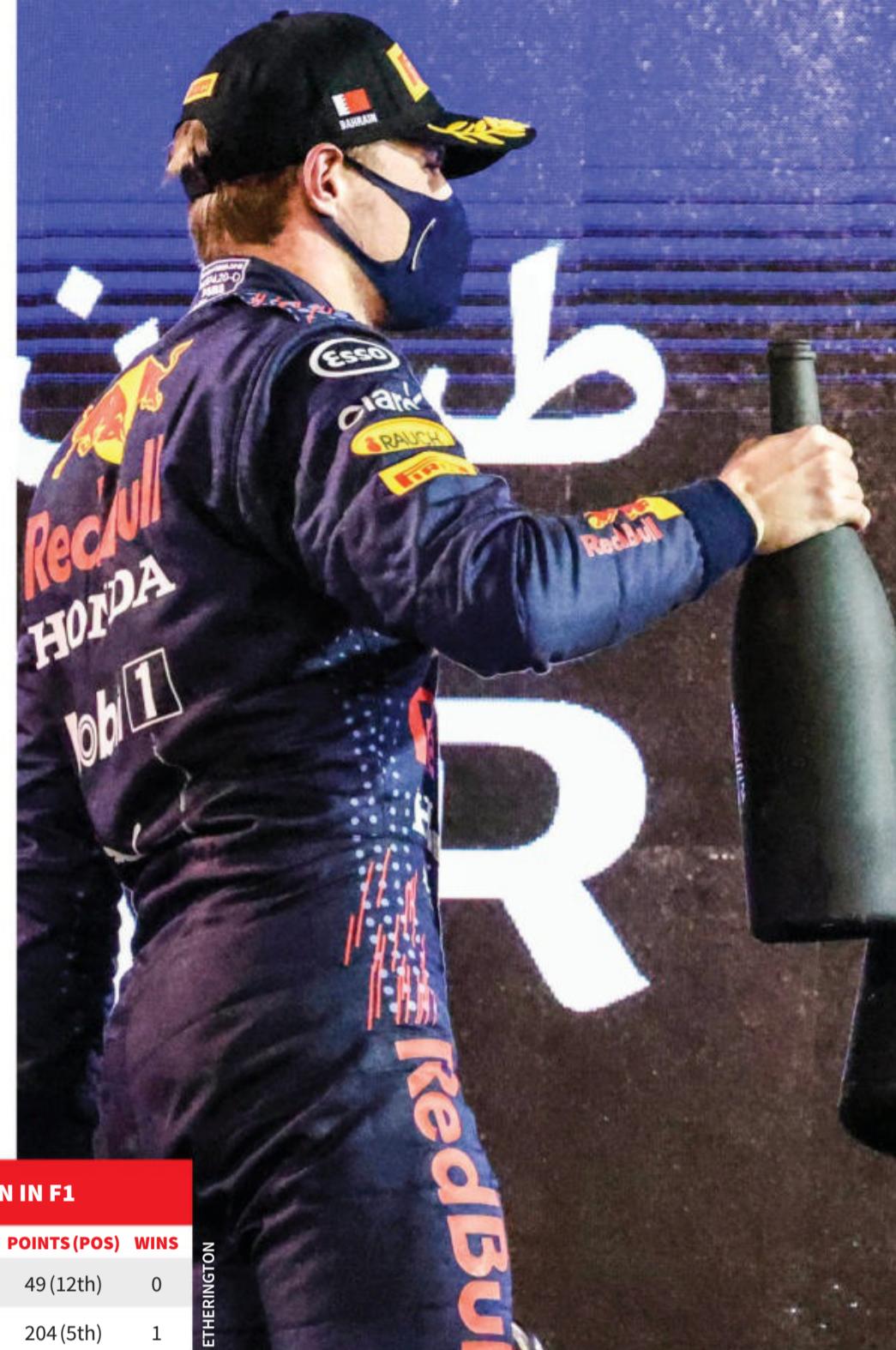
be leading the way as he has done over the past three seasons.

As Verstappen explains (see panel, right),

the RB16B appears to be a successful reworking of its volatile predecessor, in part thanks to its tweaked rear-

suspension design. And the car's advantage at this stage is significant, even if too few events have passed to be certain that it's the class of 2021, because of the almost unique technical development restrictions imposed on the season.

It cannot be automatically assumed that Mercedes will simply develop its way out of trouble this year. But the team has not revealed how it has spent its development tokens, and F1's best team is more than capable of fine-tuning its current package into an even more formidable force, so it may yet improve against Red Bull's strong start. Mercedes simply





"I AM NOT SOMEONE WHO COPIES. IF YOU COPY STUFF FROM OTHERS, YOU'RE ALWAYS GOING TO BE BEHIND"

won't give up – and neither will Hamilton.

If Verstappen does go on to score what would be a sensational first car racing title in 2021, it'll be even more significant precisely because of that incredible competition. Hamilton and Mercedes have been so successful that the driver who ends their run will go down in history, in much the same way that Alonso will forever be remembered as the driver who closed the Michael Schumacher era, and Schumacher himself took on the mantle of F1's benchmark racer from Ayrton Senna. That is what stands before Verstappen in 2021, even if he won't be drawn on such speculation.

"Nah," he replies, certainty seeping through his dismissal of our question. "For me it doesn't matter what driver you're fighting against at the end of the day. I think there's so many good drivers in F1. Of course, some have won more titles than others, some haven't won anything. But there's just a bit of luck as well. There are world champions, really for a lot of years, but that doesn't mean they were the only great drivers who were actually around at that time. You just need the luck – that you're in the right team, at the right place and are dominant for a long time. And that not always happens."

"You have to accept that; 'I hope that I will be in a position to fight for a championship or whatever, in the near future.' If that's going to be one, seven or whatever – I mean, that's just up to how long the team will stay dominant."

There's no doubt that Max Verstappen knows how good he is, and appears utterly unfazed by his potential. Now comes his biggest test, but it's one for which he is certainly ready. ■

ERADICATING RED BULL'S WEAKNESSES



COATES

It was clear from early in 2020 that Red Bull's RB16 was tough for its drivers to handle. It took many months into the year – team boss Christian Horner didn't concede something was "misbehaving aerodynamically" until round three – before the squad admitted there was more to it than drivers finding its limit.

On the first morning of 2021 pre-season testing, Max Verstappen half-spun the RB16B exiting the opening corners of the Bahrain track, and his initial runs did not look altogether comfortable. But that quickly changed, with Mercedes strategy director James Vowles commenting after testing that Red Bull's car looked "planted".

"There's nothing missing now," says Verstappen, who came into the new season 1kg lighter than in previous years.

The rest of testing ran smoothly for Red Bull, other than Sergio Perez having an engine cover blow off as he overtook the Williams of Nicholas Latifi on the second day of three. It was this lack of issues, allied with testing's fastest time, that led Verstappen to say "definitely it has been the best [pre-season]" of his time at the team so far.

The Bahrain race weekend didn't go quite as smoothly, even if Verstappen's performances confirmed that Red Bull has F1's best package. Verstappen damaged his floor early in qualifying; Perez was knocked out in the middle segment of that session and his car lost all electrical power on the initial formation lap. Verstappen also had to contend with a suspected differential problem early in the race, which he was able to drive around, but Horner reckoned "seemed to compromise his first sector compared to the Mercedes".

But when it comes to how his team operates in comparison with Mercedes, Verstappen is certain it has what it takes to succeed. He subtly suggested that Red Bull might need to alter its future practice programmes to ensure it has a more flexible tyre strategy at upcoming events, but was no doubt aware that were it not for his late wheel-to-wheel error, then Red Bull's strategy in the season opener would have been successful.

"Every team has their weak spots," says Verstappen. "But, in general, we just have to make sure we have a faster car – then everything becomes a lot easier. Because if you start ahead, and you just have the better car, then it's a lot easier to score your points – without any risk. So, that's what we have to work on. Because I'm pretty sure that if we have that fast car, I think as a team and the way the team is operating, we are very strong. I don't see any weakness in that area [for Red Bull]."

STAT
11

Marciello's race wins tally
since making the GT
switch in 2017





FROM FERRARI PROTEGE TO MERCEDES PRODIGY

Raffaele Marciello once appeared to be Ferrari's next Italian F1 star, but is now under the pay of its German arch-rival in GTs – and he's very happy with his life

JAMES NEWBOLD

When Raffaele Marciello says “I don’t feel below guys that are in Formula 1”, he means it. Ranked 48th in Autosport’s top 50 drivers of 2020, below 12 from F1, the works Mercedes-AMG GT star is an in-demand 26-year-old who is content with his lot. After all, he’s racing great cars all over the world and is regarded as one of the best in his field.

Take this year’s activities. Marciello is set to compete in the GT World Challenge Europe, ADAC GT Masters and the Nürburgring Langstrecken Serie. He’s already finished second in class in the Daytona 24 Hours, and scored two class poles in the four-race Asian Le Mans Series. Over the past three years, he has contested an average of 20.3 race meetings per season, including 21 in COVID-impacted 2020.

Seven years ago, Marciello was the reigning Formula 3 European champion as a Ferrari junior. But given the choice of trading places with Alfa Romeo F1 driver Antonio Giovinazzi, who usurped him as the Italian golden boy of the Ferrari Driver Academy, Marciello is clear that he wouldn’t change anything.

“It’s not a matter of money, it’s not a matter of fame or whatever,” he explains. “I’m a racer, doing over 30 races per year and driving the best tracks in the world, so I’m happy. If I have to choose between trying to win the best GT races or Antonio trying to fight for P15, I take mine. Every time

I go on track I can push, there is less bullshit, less politics. I’m not really a political guy; I like to say what I think. That is not really the best in F1, so I think I’ve found my place and I’m happy here.”

Marciello was immediately on the pace when he switched to GTs with Jerome Policand’s Auto Sport Promotion Mercedes team in 2017, and his starring role in that year’s Spa 24 Hours, when he drove for over 14 hours and had to depart the podium for medical attention, confirmed him as one of sportscar racing’s coming men. He was given factory driver status the following year and won the overall Blancpain GT Series and Sprint Cup titles, only losing a clean sweep in the Endurance Cup when the rival Black Falcon Mercedes squad successfully appealed its exclusion for a technical infringement at the Barcelona finale. In 2019, Marciello survived constant pressure from Laurens Vanthoor and Earl Bamber to add the GT World Cup in Macau to his bulging CV, before helping the unheralded Timur Boguslavskiy to claim the overall GTWCE title in 2020, with pole positions at Spa and Barcelona – by a whopping 0.68 seconds – among the standout moments.

“One of my strengths is that I can adapt pretty quickly to everything,” he says. “If the car maybe is not in the best set-up, if it starts to rain and you’re on slicks or on a new track, normally I don’t need many laps to be on the pace.”

That point was recognised by Prema Powerteam boss ➤

Rene Rosin after the 17-year-old Marciello had dominated both FIA F3 European Championship races at Pau in 2012. It was his first time on a street circuit, and he had impressively bounced back from a practice shunt to qualify on pole. "He has speed in his heart," Rosin observed. "He can immediately get on the limit."

As a Ferrari junior, Marciello truly appeared destined for the very top. He ran current AMG stablemate Daniel Juncadella uncomfortably close to the 2012 FIA F3 and parallel F3 Euro Series titles (see panel), and beat Felix Rosenqvist to the now consolidated FIA F3 crown in 2013, with 13 wins. "When you're young and they say you are the new Italian future star, maybe you feel invincible, but you are not," reflects Marciello. "With experience, you learn to listen more to people, what is important and what is not. This is something that maybe I missed in the past."

A promising GP2 season followed in 2014 with Racing Engineering. There were a few rookie mistakes, but anyone watching his charging feature race victory in the wet at Spa, where he passed Stoffel Vandoorne with two laps to go, could be in little doubt that Marciello was a real talent. So where did it go wrong? The answer lies in a move to Trident for 2015, at a time when Ferrari was in a state of flux following the departure of Stefano Domenicali the previous year. Marco Mattiacci lasted mere months before being replaced by Maurizio Arrivabene, while long-standing chairman Luca di Montezemolo handed over to Sergio Marchionne.

"This was the key year, the bad one," says Marciello. "I was in the wrong moment in the wrong time when everything in Ferrari was changing, so I was in the limbo of everyone changing and I think there we took the wrong choice of team..."

"WHEN THEY SAY YOU ARE THE NEW ITALIAN FUTURE STAR, MAYBE YOU FEEL INVINCIBLE, BUT YOU ARE NOT"

While Alexander Rossi took his seat at Racing Engineering and finished second to runaway champion Vandoorne, Marciello didn't win a race and only once finished on the podium in a feature race. He had four Friday outings with the Ferrari-affiliated Sauber team, but that too was a team in strife – it had been taken to court for signing three drivers to fill its two race seats.

"It was nice at the beginning because everything is new, but it was like a small team that didn't bring so many updates and I didn't learn so much because every briefing was pretty much the same," he says. "I was close to being in F1 [for 2015] when Domenicali was still there, but then with the new bosses not anymore because they wanted me to win [GP2] with Trident. I said, 'If you want me to win, put me in a better car,' but it was their idea and it was not possible. I think I drove pretty much OK with what I had."

Marciello split with Ferrari prior to his 2016 season with the

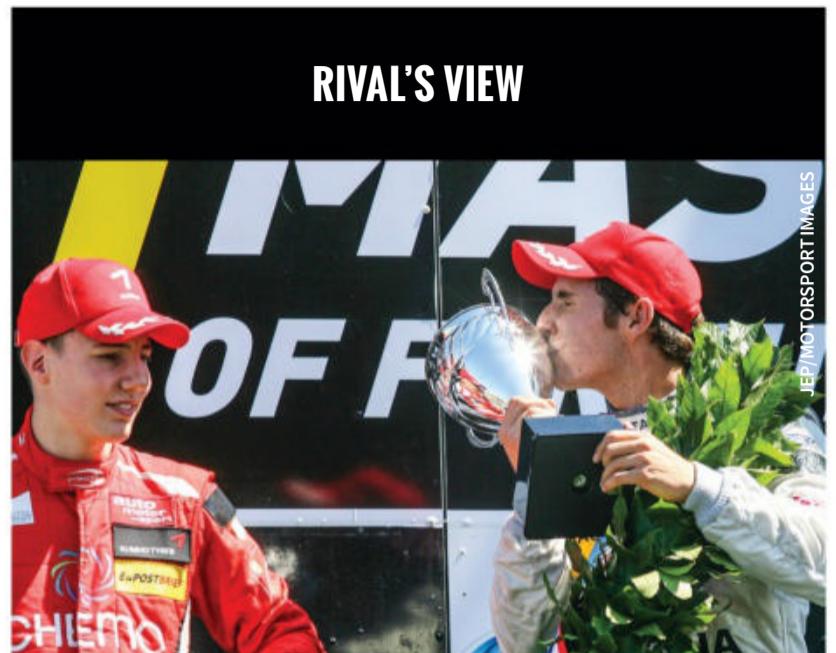


Virtuosi-run Russian Time squad, and he finished equal on points with Sergey Sirotkin, behind only Prema duo Pierre Gasly and Giovinazzi. But by season's end, he recognised the F1 dream was over and there was never any question of carrying on for a fourth season: "I was tired of it. I said, 'I don't see the point.' I see drivers that do four or five years, they are 25 and still pushing for this. For me, it's useless." He took quickly to GTs and has never looked back.

"As soon as he started GT, he closed the book of single-seaters," confirms Policand. "He never, never mentions that he won in GP2. It's not like, 'This guy in F1, I was beating him in GP2 and F3.' There are some drivers that always regret the old days and it is not the case with Lello. He just enjoys racing."

That much is evident when Marciello, who cites Robert Kubica as his favourite driver, reveals that he raced a humble SEAT Leon in an endurance race at Adria in 2019 – "We were leading and in the last





hour the clutch broke" – and finished 12th on the same year's Rally Monza in a Citroen C3 R5, with manager Alessandro Nolli Brianzi co-driving. "I would like to do some more Rally of Monza – not proper rally because I will crash pretty much straight away!" he laughs. "I like everything. If a car has four wheels, I like to do it."

Marciello has a long list of series he wants to sample, from Brazilian V8 Stock Cars to Australian Supercars, stadium super trucks and even the Dakar Rally. "I'm speaking with Alessandro every winter like, 'When we are 40 or 50, we have to do Dakar together,'" he says. "He's a very passionate driver," adds Policand. "He knows the history of F1, GT – he is not just about driving."

Money may not be a key motivator for Marciello, but there can be no doubt over his worth to Policand, who when speaking to Autosport last December called him the team's "biggest asset". "There are some drivers in GT3 who are able to be very fast and I think they are able to match him over one lap, but with a very good car," Policand said. "Lello is still able to be in front with an average car. When we won the Sprint series with Lello [in 2018], our car was not good enough to win at the Nurburgring. We were average. But Lello wins the race..."

"He's very smooth on the steering wheel, his input is just perfect. When he turns in, he turns in, that's it. He never crosses his hand or tries to catch an apex at the last moment. You never feel he is at maximum attack. You can see it's very quick, he's at the edge of the car, but he's not like some drivers making a lot of effort on the steering wheel and going sideways. He's always very relaxed."

And there's another quality that Policand admires too: "He's a good team player, he knows exactly what he wants in the car. He's not complicated and that builds the confidence of the team."

Marciello reckons it's unlikely we'll see a GT driver crack the top 10 of Autosport's 50 best drivers of the year, "because GT is difficult to judge". But he may yet prove himself wrong... **M**

Relatively little was expected of Raffaele Marciello when he joined Prema for the 2012 F3 Euro Series. Team-mate Daniel Juncadella was entering his third season and had won the previous year's Macau Grand Prix, so was banking on showing the way to this young graduate of the Italian F3 Championship. But already in testing, Marciello was on his case, prompting a frank exchange with Juncadella's engineer John McGill when the young upstart was able to carry an extra 5km/h through the final fourth-gear left-hander at Misano.

"I was having a lot of oversteer and he was having understeer, so I said to my engineer, 'I cannot do this corner like him,'" Juncadella recalls. "He was telling me that Raffaele was turning aggressively like [Fernando] Alonso was doing in his Renault F1 days, forcing the understeer to carry more speed into the corner. So I tried and I spun in the last corner. I was super-frustrated! Then my engineer says, 'Well, [Giancarlo] Fisichella couldn't do it either...' He was a rookie apparently and all the expectations were on me, but from the very beginning I realised he was going to be tough to beat."

Juncadella prevailed in their intra-team battle – which got physical at the Norisring, for which the Spaniard was excluded – but came away full of admiration for his rival. Afterwards, both clocked up Friday FP1 mileage in F1

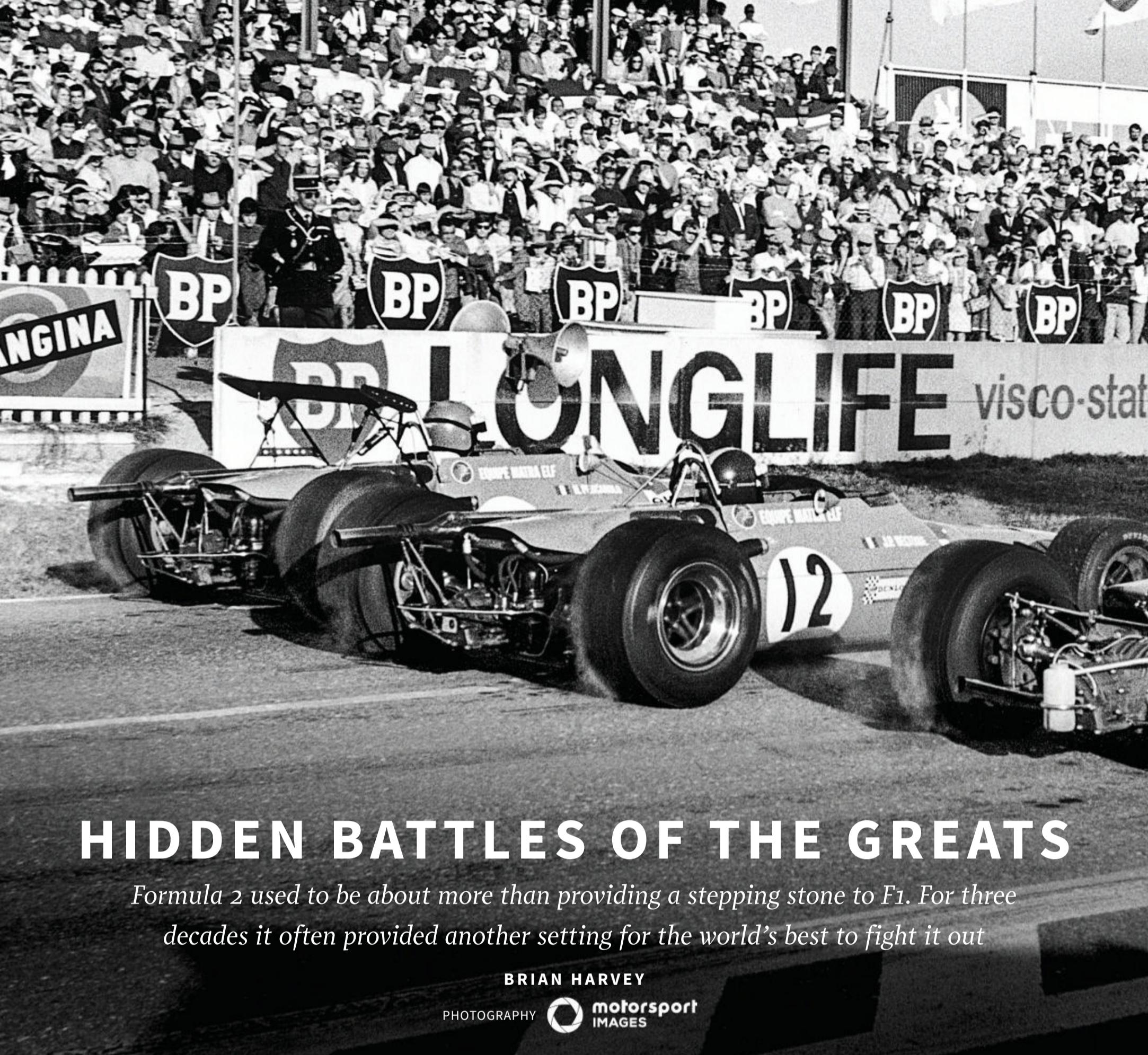
(Juncadella with Force India in 2014), but neither made the final step into a race seat. "I really thought he was going to get his [F1] chance," Juncadella says. "He ticked all the right boxes."

Their careers have aligned again in GTs. They were reunited at ASP for three races in the 2018 Blancpain GT Endurance Cup, and now Marciello and Juncadella are teaming up with fellow AMG factory driver Jules Gounon for an assault on the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup with ASP this year.

"Last year I would rate him as, just like Autosport did, the best GT3 driver, and around the AMG atmosphere together with Maro Engel, I think they were the benchmarks," says Juncadella. "This year we just need to be smart with each other. We have the speed, we have everything. It's only up to us to f*** it up at this point!"

"FROM THE START I KNEW HE'D BE TOUGH TO BEAT"





HIDDEN BATTLES OF THE GREATS

Formula 2 used to be about more than providing a stepping stone to F1. For three decades it often provided another setting for the world's best to fight it out

BRIAN HARVEY

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

Formula 1 talent at the wheel of Formula 2? With single-seater racing so delineated now, this would seem unlikely to many modern fans.

The very aim of F2 is to discover talent for accession to F1, but in 1948, when F2 began, a more accessible entry into single-seater racing was its purpose. Constructors were expected to make their wares available to all and naturally the best drivers were used by works teams, creating an open door for anyone to compete with the great racing stars of the day. The F1 world championship calendar was much shorter in the 1950s and 1960s, so top drivers appeared in many different categories, including F2.

Today, drivers arrive in F1 untested race-wise in the company of those they are about to encounter. Would they wish for that opportunity – and who from F1 would accept the risk? – if allowed?

“You could go out in your private Lotus or Brabham, as I did, and get an accurate measure of your own talent in a straight fight with Graham Hill, Jochen Rindt or Jackie Stewart,” said sportscar legend Derek Bell in his autobiography *My Racing Life*, written with Alan Henry. “It was a tremendously valuable experience.”

Battles between great F1 names in F1 are well documented, but there were some epic F2 encounters, arguably where the playing field was more level, that are often forgotten. And occasionally someone from the F2 ranks beat the stars.

During this ‘open’ period there were five iterations of F2. The first was for two-litre engines of any configuration, so in stepped Ferrari with a V12. Supercharging of 500cc was allowed but failed and was soon excluded. The leading grand prix drivers of the post-war period were Jean-Pierre Wimille, Raymond Sommer, the pre-war

Auto Union maestro Hans Stuck, Luigi Villoresi, his protege Alberto Ascari and versatile Piero Taruffi. In 1949 Argentinians Juan Manuel Fangio and Jose Froilan Gonzalez arrived, nationally sponsored.

In 1954 the new 2.5-litre F1 made that form of F2 pointless, so a replacement arrived in mid-1956 for 1500cc machines, with a maximum of six cylinders. It provided opportunities to race against Stirling Moss, Tony Brooks, Peter Collins, Jean Behra, Roy Salvadori and Mike Hawthorn. There was no specified limit to F1 drivers’ involvement, which peaked in 1960.

That year a European Championship had just five rounds including two hitherto established F1 events: the GP-length Aintree 200 and the classic German GP – because a home car might (and did) win. By then, it wasn’t obvious to the uninitiated as to which formula was present. The Coventry Climax FPF engine was ubiquitous in



Jochen Rindt (2), Jean-Pierre Beltoise (12) and eventual winner Henri Pescarolo blast off at Albi in 1968

all but Porsche and Ferrari works cars and most of F1; an engine swap did the trick. So the formulas were visually and audibly almost identical. A stopwatch might tell you, but not always.

"I dashed off to Syracuse for the F2 race, then the GP of Brussels, in which I had a big carve-up with Moss," said triple F1 world champion Jack Brabham of 1960 in his book *When the Flag Drops*. "These F2 races were becoming as important as grands prix."

This was not supplemental activity at all: it was mainstream. Then that 1500cc limit became F1 for 1961, so 1100cc Formula Junior replaced F2 as the feeder formula, from which F1 ranks were excluded.

A third iteration of F2 arrived for 1964-66 of 1000cc and four cylinders. A demand for 1200cc was ignored – just as well, since these cars might have embarrassed F1 had it been accepted. So world champions Jim Clark, Graham Hill, Brabham and, by 1965,

John Surtees were available for attack by F2 regulars. And in 1965 three future world champions joined the F1 ranks: Jackie Stewart straight from F3 to BRM, Denny Hulme with Brabham, and Jochen Rindt joining Cooper.

Come 1966, the three-litre F1 demanded a 'better' feeder formula, which came in the form of 1600cc F2 and did the job thoroughly from 1967 onwards. Chris

Rindt leads fellow Formula 1 stars Jack Brabham and Jackie Stewart at Brands Hatch in 1967



PHIPPS

Amon and Pedro Rodriguez joined the 'F1 in F2' fun, but the loss of Clark in an April 1968 F2 event at Hockenheim – a race often referred to as 'minor' but which had several current or future F1 drivers in the field – was one of the category's darkest days.

The new European F2 Championship had been won by Jacky Ickx in 1967 and he promptly became an F1 fixture, so joining the 'F1 in F2' clan. Ronnie Peterson, regarded as one of the kings of F2, joined the F1 circus in 1970, and mid-season so did Emerson Fittipaldi, Clay Regazzoni and Francois Cevert. The two-litre era began in 1972, but the F1 factor fell away during the decade.

Through all except the first iteration one name was common: Graham Hill, the most prolific of them, put his reputation 'on the line' 18 times in 1967 while also chasing the F1 title and defending his Indianapolis 500 crown. He wasn't the exception as Brabham, Clark, Rindt and Stewart all made a dozen or more F2 outings that year.

Those named are the 'royalty' of F1, but anyone signed to a regular seat in a top works squad (or, in those days, a major private team such as Rob Walker's) should be classified as a bona fide F1 driver. This expands the 'F1 in F2' club to 93 names, with around 1550 entries between them in approximately 350 races. In the 30 years of this culture, which ended in 1978, F1 talent was present in 84% of major F2 races.

None of those are remembered in the world championship history books but they deserve recognition – as an alternative battleground for some of motorsport's greatest drivers, and for letting rising stars test themselves in a way that is no longer possible. ■

P32 TOP 10 'F1 IN F2' RACES

TOP 10 'F1 IN F2' RACES

Here are some of the finest F2 contests fought out by top talent, with significant events from the whole era selected to provide a flavour

BRIAN HARVEY

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

THE RISE OF RINDT

1964, MALLORY PARK AND CRYSTAL PALACE

10

Sometimes two events gel into a double-header. The moveable Christian festival of Whitsun in 1964 started on Sunday

17 May with the Grovewood Trophy at short Mallory Park, 30 laps giving 40.5 miles.

Lotus entered Jim Clark and Peter Arundell, with Tony Maggs making it three from F1.

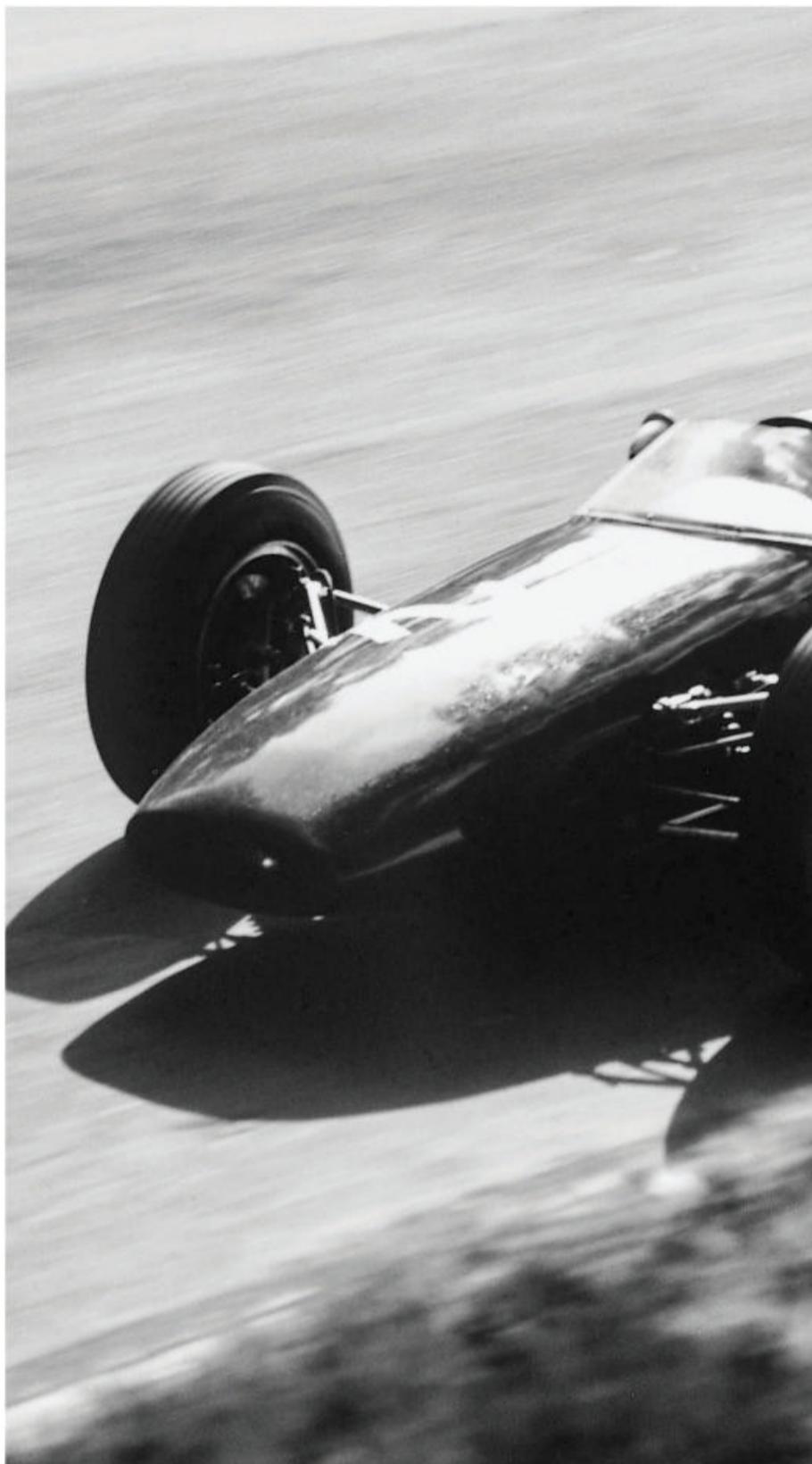
New to Britain was Austrian Jochen Rindt, in his third F2 race in his Brabham. He asked works Brabham driver Denny Hulme to show him around, which Hulme sportingly accepted for a newcomer on foreign territory. Rindt then claimed pole!

A clutch problem ruined Rindt's start, but he climbed from the back to snatch third from Alan Rees at the flag, just 8.2 seconds behind winner Clark. What would have happened but for the clutch?

The London Trophy took place the next day at Crystal Palace. Graham Hill appeared in John Coombs's Cooper, making two world champions (including Clark) in the field. Heat one went to Hill from Clark and Hulme, but the 'Austrian Interloper' took heat two from Rees, both given identical times just 0.4s slower than Hill's.

That gave Hill pole for the final. While Rees took an early lead, Hill passed him on lap two. Then the Cooper began understeering, and Rindt moved to the front. The battle between Rindt, Hill and Rees ran all the way, and they finished in that order. Clark pitted from fourth with loose plug leads and never recovered.

"New star shines at the Palace," said the headline on Autosport's report, which concluded: "It will be a long time before we see such a surprising or closely fought race."



SCHLEGLMILCH



BATTLE OF THE 1600cc SCREAMERS

1968 MEDITERRANEAN GP, ENNA-PERGUSA

9

The trek to Sicily for the Mediterranean GP at superfast Enna-Pergusa in 1968, the second year of 1600cc F2, deterred some as only 20 could race. But the field included Ferraris for Jacky Ickx, Derek Bell, Ernesto Brambilla and Mario Casoni. The 'F1 clan' present was Ickx, Jochen Rindt, Pedro Rodriguez and 'rookie' Piers Courage, who took pole in his Frank Williams-run Brabham.

Spreading the grid didn't avert slipstreaming on this wide circuit. Nine soon got together as a tow could be felt from way back. Rindt

took it easy, knowing which lap mattered, occasionally 'testing the waters' in second, and once dropped back to change goggles. Soon his Roy Winkelmann Racing Brabham was back with the lead pack, and Rindt knew how to lead at the critical point. Winning by a metre was as good as a mile.

Rindt had already shown this incredible racecraft at Hockenheim and Reims. The 'Formula 2 king', Courage, Brambilla and Regazzoni (Tecno) were each credited with identical race times, all within 0.1s. Rindt's fastest lap also represented an average of 147mph, within 10% of Indianapolis at the time!



SURTEES CONFIRMS HIS FOUR-WHEELED CLASS

1960 AINTREE 200

8

In April 1960 the International Aintree 200 was run for F2 instead of F1 machinery. Thirteen of the F1 circus were among a huge 31-strong field. It looked like F1, with Porsche 'substituting' for BRM but no Ferrari yet.

Three Porsche 718/2s – two works plus Rob Walker's car for Stirling Moss – three works Lotus 18s and hordes of Coopers were the field. Moss's and Graham Hill's Porsches sandwiched Jack Brabham's Cooper on the front row, with Innes Ireland's Lotus back on row four.

The Coopers of Brabham and Roy Salvadori, both privately entered, led at first as Moss made a cautious start. Ireland's Lotus stormed through, taking second from Salvadori, but spun trying to take Brabham's lead and dropped to ninth.

Ireland recovered to fourth just before team-mate Alan Stacey retired, but then suffered a puncture, leaving Hill to chase the Brabham/Salvadori battle. At mid-point, both Coopers unexpectedly retired when a charging Moss had closed to within 5s. So with Moss now leading from Jo Bonnier and Hill, a 1-2-3 for Porsche looked certain, with the leading Cooper well back in the hands of 'novice' John Surtees, taking part in his third car race.

Learning as he went, Surtees hauled himself into contention, equalising Moss's pole time and smashing the F2 record by 4.4s! At the finish he was 6s adrift of the Bonnier/Hill duel, and had left Maurice Trintignant and other F1 drivers over 40s back. Moss's winning speed of 88.41mph would have given him fourth in the previous year's British Grand Prix!

This was 'only F2' but it had produced a memorable race – and a shining new star. Surtees's achievement cannot be overstated. Lotus snatched him straight into F1, despite his commitment to MV Agusta for two motorcycle world titles.



JAMES HUNT GRABS EVERYONE'S ATTENTION 1972, OULTON PARK

7

Two-litre engines were introduced to F2 in 1972, and the Ford BDA unit was universal.

The Oulton Park Gold Cup in mid-September was the final of the British F2 Championship. Six from F1 arrived, headed by John Surtees (winner of the non-championship F1 Gold Cup at Oulton for the previous two years), Graham Hill, Ronnie Peterson, Peter Gethin, Tim Schenken and F1 rookie Niki Lauda. Gethin's engine blew during practice, leaving five for the F2 boys to aim at.

Peterson and his works March took pole by 0.4s from a guy new to F2 driving a one-year-old March: Hesketh Racing's James Hunt.

Surtees put his TS10 on row three, with Hill's Brabham on row four.

Jody Scheckter grabbed an early lead from row two to head Peterson, as Surtees retired with electrical gremlins. Schenken's Rondel Brabham moved up to second, but Scheckter stretched his lead until his McLaren's clutch failed on lap 16 of 40, leaving Schenken in charge.

The Australian did not last much longer thanks to a broken petrol pump pulley wheel. Now it was Peterson from Hunt and Lauda, while John Watson fought through to fourth and closed on the leading trio until low oil pressure halted his Chevron. That left Peterson to fend off Hunt, with his future F1 sparring partner Lauda in close attendance.

With four laps left and despite a sagging rear wing, Hunt outbraked Peterson at Knickerbrook. At Esso the determined Swede forced him to the outside onto the dirty surface and an excursion, the recovery dropping Hunt 14s behind Lauda.

Lauda followed his team leader home, both recording 112mph race averages, with a disappointed Hunt in third. The first three plus Watson shared fastest lap equal to the pole

time; veteran Hill finished 10th.

It had been a thrilling race involving past, present and future F1 stars whose racing careers would span 35 years. Hunt's huge reception included the crowd chanting his name. He had an old car with a wonky wing, yet he still led the F2 clan home. With Hunt having earlier trashed his F3 season, Lord Hesketh kept faith with him – he'd now gone 'from gutter to glory'.

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PERFORMANCE**



HOME TEAM LOSES AS FERRARI FIRES WARNING SHOT

1960 SOLITUDE GP

6

Held over a seven-mile public road circuit in Germany, the 1960 Solitude GP attracted 12 F1 drivers. There were two Ferraris, for Phil Hill and Wolfgang von Trips (the German's rear-engined), works Lotuses for Innes Ireland and Jim Clark, Porsches for BRM's F1 trio of Graham Hill, Dan Gurney and Jo Bonnier, and John Surtees replacing the injured Stirling Moss in Rob Walker's Porsche. Coopers were in the F1 hands of Jack Brabham, Olivier Gendebien, Maurice Trintignant and Masten Gregory. A fourth works Porsche was for Hans Herrmann, not of the 'F1 clan'.

On this long and wet track, Clark took pole by 0.5s from von Trips and the Porsches, which were split by Jack Lewis – a Welsh farmer who was fastest Cooper driver!

Graham Hill led after a lap, chased hard by the other Porsches, von Trips, Ireland and Brabham. Clark was ninth, but led four laps

later and pulled away. On lap 10 of 20, Clark's 12s lead was lost when the Lotus overheated and he pitted for water. Surtees had spun with gearchange trouble and was out.

That left Herrmann and von Trips battling for the lead but, with three laps left, the Ferrari asserted its authority. Von Trips (below) came home to win by 3.6s, providing a taste of what 1961 F1 would look like.

The Porsches of Bonnier, Hill and Gurney followed in a blanket finish but nearly 35s adrift of runner-up Herrmann, with the Ireland/Phil Hill battle another half-minute back. Clark's problem kept him out of the hunt, lapped in eighth.

Lewis and Brabham had retired, so the leading Cooper at the finish was Gregory's Maserati-powered car in ninth. Cooper's dominant days in F2 were over.

But Porsche, despite a huge effort on home ground, was beaten by the 'new-age' Ferrari and, morally, by Clark. "I've never had to drive so hard for fifth," reckoned Gurney.



MCKEIN

FANGIO VERSUS ASCARI IN FERRARIS – IN ITALY

1949 MONZA GP

5

The second running of the Gran Premio di Monza was held on 26 June 1949 over the same distance as the later Italian GP. That makes this the longest F2 race ever at 313.2 miles.

The GP stars were Alberto Ascari, his experienced mentor Luigi Villoresi, Hans Stuck and, in his debut season in Europe, Juan Manuel Fangio. Sponsored for seven selected F1 races, the Argentinian was unbeaten aside from a retirement at Spa!

Ascari was back after recovering from injuries sustained in March in Brazil, so Fangio requested funds for a Ferrari for this important F2 race. The \$11,000 was only delivered by IOU as the grid formed, allowing Fangio to join them.

Villoresi had secured pole by 1.8s from Ascari, Felice Bonetto (all works Ferraris) and Stuck's AFM-BMW. Fangio and Chico Landi occupied row two. All six battled for the lead, and all but Landi (Ferrari) led at some point.

Villoresi dropped out after 18 of the 80 laps and Stuck pitted twice, so at half distance it was Ascari, Fangio and Bonetto together.

Fuel and tyre stops left Fangio with a deficit of 19s. He closed fast on Ascari, who pulled away again as Fangio encountered overheating. On lap 67 Ascari got stuck in third gear and pitted for a cure, while Fangio's issues increased



BRABHAM PIPS CLARK IN EPIC CONTEST

1964 INTERNATIONAL GOLD CUP, OULTON PARK

4

The 1963 Gold Cup had been a championship-class F1 race won by Jim Clark. How would F2 compete with that?

The entry helped. Three world champions – Jack Brabham, Clark and Graham Hill – were on the front row, along with future champion Denny Hulme, all covered by 0.6s. The Lotus team included up-and-comers Mike Spence and then-F3 star Jackie Stewart as support to Clark. The Brabham squad of 'The Boss' Jack and Hulme were 'aided' by Hill in John Coombs's BT10.

At first Clark led Hulme, Hill and poleman Brabham, this quartet in close formation in front of Alan Rees, who as usual was heading the 'true' F2 drivers.

Hill pitted after seven laps for a driveshaft repair, while Hulme's similar Brabham took the lead and held off Clark. Brabham then moved to the front and Hulme suffered suspension trouble, leaving Brabham and Clark to battle superbly, sometimes swapping places twice a lap. For the last five laps Clark tried everything to no avail, losing by a whisker – 0.2s.

Rees's superb drive came to an end with less than five laps to go with tappet trouble, so Stewart gained the final podium spot. It had been a superb race, run within 3% of the F1 pace the year before, causing Autosport to suggest it had helped establish "F2 as a substitute for GP racing where it is not practical to stage full-scale F1 events".



with low oil pressure and broken wheel spokes causing a vibration.

And yet, after 3h08m49s, Fangio won in his "mobile furnace" from a closing Bonetto, with Ascari a lap back. Scuderia Ferrari had been beaten by the 'outsider' on its home circuit, albeit one using the same Ferrari 166C as the works drivers. Only Ascari could have beaten him, but would he have done so? Fangio's fastest lap surpassed Villoresi's pole time by a whole 2s at nearly 103mph.

Fangio returned home to a hero's welcome. With six wins from eight races, was 1949 Fangio's best year? It's hard to say, but this was the first European battle of two giants en route to legendary status.

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THE ULTIMATE SLIPSTREAMER?

1967 REIMS GP

3

In 1967 Reims had been deemed unsuitable for F1, the French GP moving to the new Le Mans Bugatti circuit (which proved even more unsuitable). So, on 25 June, F2 came to Reims's rescue. The drivers relished its special, high-speed nature and all the major teams entered, including Ferrari, which sadly didn't turn up on the day, declaring its car not ready.

Jackie Stewart took pole at 138.8mph in his Tyrrell-run Matra, but as usual for this famous slipstreaming circuit the field formed into groups of cars in the race. Jochen Rindt, Stewart, Jean-Pierre Beltoise, Alan Rees, Jackie Oliver and Jim Clark formed the leading bunch at first.

Clark's Lotus and Rees's Roy Winkelmann Racing Brabham retired just after half-distance, and now the quintet of Stewart, Rindt, Graham Hill (Lotus), John Surtees (Lola) and Denny Hulme (Brabham) pulled clearly

away as they put on a multi-marque contest.

"They were howling past the pits two and three abreast, dodging in and out of each other's slipstream, and one never knew who would lead next," reported Autosport's Simon Taylor.

With supreme judgement, Rindt pulled off the rare feat of choosing to lead out of the final corner, the right-handed Thillois, and hold on to the chequered flag. The Austrian beat Hill by 0.2s, with Surtees, Stewart and Hulme right behind. Only 0.7s covered these five F1 stars at the finish – a foretaste of the 1971 Italian GP, but in this case all of the Reims protagonists were past or future world champions.

Jacky Ickx led the F2 clan home in sixth, almost two minutes adrift in the sister Tyrrell Matra to Stewart's. He narrowly held off Oliver's Lotus. The average speed of 134mph on this power circuit was just 2% from the 1966 French GP pace.



HONDA NOT QUITE UNBEATABLE

1966 MOTOR SHOW 200, BRANDS HATCH

2

Brabham-Hondas in the hands of Jack Brabham and Denny Hulme had dominated the final season of 1000cc F2 in 1966. The last chance to beat the combination came at Brands Hatch at the end of October and a great field assembled for the Motor Show 200,

though Hulme was in the United States, so Brabham gave his car to Chris Irwin.

Heat one, for the works cars, contained all the stars, but Brabham was at the back after missing practice. He still shot through to second behind Jochen Rindt's Brabham-Cosworth within five laps and settled for that, ahead of the Lotus of Jim

Clark. Irwin was fifth behind Jean-Pierre Beltoise.

Rindt had the notoriously steep pole position for the final and Brabham led from the off. Rindt stuck to him, with Clark hanging on as the top three drew away.

After attacking all the way, Rindt's moment came on lap 26 of 40. They came up to lap Chris Lambert, whose gear lever broke. As Lambert ran wide he delayed Brabham, and Rindt went past in a flash. "Every lap Rindt and Brabham seemed to leave their braking a fraction later and every lap their angles through Bottom Bend [now Graham Hill Bend] got more acute," reported Autosport. "But Brabham could not push Rindt into a mistake."

With 140bhp from his Brabham-Cosworth, Rindt held off Brabham's 150 Honda horses right to the end, winning by 0.2s, with Clark an envious spectator four seconds back.

These three were a minute ahead of the rest, led by the Matra of Jacky Ickx, once again leader of the F2 fraternity.

To underline the pace of the cars by the end of the 1000cc era, Brabham's fastest lap of 1m36.0s was a whole second better than his three-litre F1 Brabham-Repco had gone on its way to winning the British GP three months earlier. Three of the greatest drivers of the time had produced one of the most exciting dramas, climaxing with defeat of the mighty Honda.



THE PERFECT F2 RECIPE

1965 INTERNATIONAL GOLD CUP, OULTON PARK

1

Four world champions were among the 11-strong F1 fraternity for the second Gold Cup run to 1000cc F2 regulations: John Surtees, Jim Clark, Graham Hill and Jack Brabham. And there were three future title winners: Denny Hulme, Jackie Stewart and Jochen Rindt.

A single second covered the first eight of the 27-strong grid, headed by Hulme's Brabham. The only non-F1 driver among them was Alan Rees, heading the second row. After its poor showing earlier in the year, Jack Brabham gave the revised Honda unit another go and was the last of the eight, but any Honda improvement was hidden until 1966 as his clutch failed at the start.

Rindt's Winkelmann Brabham took off best, but Hulme led after a hectic first lap before dropping to third. Rindt, Clark, Rindt again and Rees led successive laps. Amazingly, the pressure got to Clark, who dramatically ran off at Cascades on lap eight of 40, dropping to 16th after hauling his Lotus back onto the track in this highly contested event. It wasn't just the leaders, as further back there was a great scrap between Brian Hart and Alan Rollinson.

Rees's Brabham also hit the front before losing out to the Lola of Surtees at half-distance. Now Surtees, Hill (John Coombs Lotus-BRM), Rees, Hulme and Rindt scrapped away, with Surtees seeming to have the upper hand.

Reigning world champion Surtees nevertheless lost the lead to Hulme on laps 26 and 27, but then recovered to lead from Rees, who shortly afterwards spun to sixth. After Rindt retired, Surtees fought off Hulme and Hill. The Kiwi

was within touching distance of the leading Lola of Surtees at Knickerbrook on the last lap, and 0.6s covered the trio at the flag. Trevor Taylor's Brabham was fourth from Rees. Clark recovered to sixth to claim the British F2 title by a single point from Hill, his comeback including fastest lap, just 2s from his F1 record.

There had been constant drama in a

breathtaking, hard-fought race, which also included a charge from one of motorsport's legends. "No one could possibly have left Oulton Park without feeling that they had seen absolutely top-class motor racing," said Autosport. "One of the greatest races seen in this country."

F1 stars (and Rees) in F2 cars on this drivers' track was the perfect recipe.



A LAUNCHPAD FOR FUTURE STARS?

The value of beating a Formula 1 driver rested, of course, on who was beaten, the circumstances and the numbers encountered – 13 was the most in any race. Wins for non-F1 drivers were rare.

John Surtees's fourth at Aintree in 1960 amid those 13 gained him instant promotion to the top tier. Bruce McLaren's win for Cooper in the F2 class of the 1958 German GP, after Phil Hill spun off in his Ferrari, also leaps out. Jack Brabham (Cooper) and Graham Hill (Lotus) failed to finish, but neither had headed McLaren, and a 1959 works



Cooper F1 drive was sealed. But not all wanted an F1 career. In late 1958, Jim Russell beat Brabham, the lone F1 driver present, in a straight fight at Montlhéry,

followed in early 1959 with a win in the wet at Oulton Park against Brabham, Roy Salvadori and McLaren. But he was almost 40 years old and had a renowned

racing school to run.

In the mid-1960s Alan Rees (above) regularly mixed it with top F1 opposition, winning over Brabham at

Reims and Rindt at Enna-Pergusa. But he felt his career had peaked and he retired aged 30 to create March, supplying the 'ar' in the marque's name.

Chronologically, head-to-heads with F1 stars helped give us the GP careers of Bruce McLaren, Cliff Allison, Graham Hill, Innes Ireland, Chris Bristow (sadly soon lost), John Surtees, Jim Clark, Jackie Stewart, Denny Hulme, Jochen Rindt, Jacky Ickx, Francois Cevert, Emerson Fittipaldi, Clay Regazzoni, Niki Lauda, James Hunt and Jody Scheckter. Ten became world champions.

RACE CENTRE

EXTREME E ALULA • WORLD OF SPORT



MAIN PIC: LOPEZ, INSET: S BLOXHAM



'ROSBERG BEATS HAMILTON' AS EXTREME E BREAKS NEW GROUND

The spectacle was indisputable, and the teething problems will help the electric off-road series with the F1 world champion team owners evolve

MATT KEW

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport
IMAGES



Xtreme E's maiden voyage into the breathtakingly beautiful AlUla desert in Saudi Arabia last weekend emphatically met Oscar Wilde's criteria for what's good and bad in life. The championship was talked about as Nico Rosberg's hand-picked driver line-up of Johan Kristoffersson and Molly Taylor scored an emphatic and historic victory amid the dunes. Social media was a motorsport hubbub during and after the action's beaming via satellites to be broadcast via UK television network colossuses ITV, BT Sport, Sky Sports and the BBC.

Series co-founder Alejandro Agag cares deeply about the spectacle. Those overlapping rights deals were offered for a minimal fee to get as many eyes as possible on his latest all-electric venture. He stopped by the media centre to watch the dramatic Shoot Out race and sat next to Autosport. Moments before Chip Ganassi Racing charge Kyle LeDuc wiped out Abt Cupra racer Claudia Hurtgen, he was imploring the director to cut from one camera angle to the next as the Odyssey 21 E-SUVs were lost amid the plumes of dust.

Visibility included, there were plenty of issues throughout the weekend. Myriad reliability faults for car builder Spark Racing Technology to go away and resolve; driver complaints over the wide-open nature of the 5.48-mile course that snaked between the walls of the sandstone gorges; discontent for the lack of rear-suspension travel and damping that catapulted axles into the air at will; and wheel-to-wheel racing that only ever lasted as far as Turn 1. But those 20 seconds in the finale when Kristoffersson was dicing with Sébastien Loeb and Timmy Hansen were a sight to behold. It was the spectacle Agag wanted, if perhaps not quite the absolute ➤

“motorsport gold” he reckoned it to be. Those moments will be remembered, which is why Extreme E can count its global litmus test as a big success.

The behaviour of the sand had changed wildly compared to the first recce of the venue in January 2019. Back then it was humid and settled. But in the far drier conditions last week, it billowed up as the cars traversed the desert floor to leave driver visibility at a premium. That prompted an eleventh-hour change to the race format. Qualifying heats were dropped in favour of one-car time trials on Saturday. For the following day, grids were capped at three cars, rather than four and five entries, in a bid to increase safety.

Initially that garnered flak for a lack of foresight. But those complaints soon fell silent as the weekend gained a proper structure overnight. There was now a natural crescendo. If one car could look incredible passing on its own, then just wait a few hours to witness three of them trading paint. That was the stunning case off the line in the finale.

Those who didn’t progress into the final distributed their share of the ‘GridPlay’ popular vote to decide starting positions for the climax. Chiefly helped by the support of Jenson Button’s JBXE squad and Carlos Sainz Sr’s Acciona Sainz concern, so-called ‘Crazy Race’ victor Andretti United was elected to start on pole from the favoured left-hand side. Hansen reckoned he and team-mate Catie Munnings had earned the backing because “we were underdogs” compared to Lewis Hamilton’s X44 squad and semi-final victor Rosberg X Racing. The 2019 World Rallycross champion quipped that he had “a lot of beers to buy for the other teams”, and that team co-owner and McLaren Racing boss Zak Brown had some discounts to offer on the marque’s range of sportscars.

As the sun doused the Middle East in temperatures above 30°C, the Williams Advanced Engineering battery and Spark motors and invertors felt the strain. Combined with more hushed concerns



over track speed, the maximum 400kW output of the cars – equivalent to 550bhp – was wound all the way back to 225kW (300bhp). So as Hansen took the race start for the finale alongside Loeb and Kristoffersson and scrabbled off the line, he immediately deployed the four-second ‘hyperdrive’ power boost to get up to speed.

That gave Hansen an initial lead of a half-dozen car lengths and a much-envied clear view ahead. But in a nod to a cheesy line from *The Fast and the Furious* franchise, it was a case of ‘too soon junior’ for the 28-year-old Swede.

His compatriot Kristoffersson, whose three World Rallycross titles play Hansen’s one, emerged from the middle slot on the starting grid and ran parallel with Loeb for the opening sprint. That forced the

nine-time World Rally champion to take his Prodrive-run X44 machine off line and over the ruts in a bid for clean air. Loeb slowed, and it allowed Kristoffersson to pull across the nose of his decorated rival to the far left of the stage.

Kristoffersson took the wide line to turn in early for the sprint to the first corner and straighten the RXR machine sooner on the other side of the apex. He then thumbed his hyperdrive button to slingshot out of the corner, fly waywardly over the crests and into a lead that he and co-driver Taylor would never relinquish.

He ended the 4m51s lap with a staggering half-minute advantage over Hansen, while Loeb fell swiftly backwards as he muscled with one of at least three power-steering failures for teams last weekend. A sublime sprint done, Kristoffersson stamped on the anchors to enter the 30km/h (19mph) driver-changeover zone. This time, he took control manually after a software glitch had disengaged the pit limiter during qualifying for an innocent Taylor, and cost them a 60-second penalty.

While Kristoffersson’s form was utterly imperious, it denied viewers a chance to see how effective 2016 Australian Rally champion Taylor had been all weekend. She backed right off to preserve the car and the impending spoils of glory.

“I was driving at recce speed, taking it really, really easy,” she said. “But that’s the thing about the track, it’s just so rough. So even when you’re taking it easy, it’s still moving around. I was just trying to at least give myself the margin so





I could react and be in control.

"When you have a 30s lead, there's no point to try and set a lap time because you gain literally nothing. After all Johan's amazing job to do that, I needed to do my job and not necessarily try to go out and prove how fast you can do a lap. At that point, you've got to do the job for the team. That was the focus."

As a result, Taylor gave 11s back to the chasing Munnings. But it wasn't close. She crossed the line a good 24s clear to crown herself and Kristoffersson as deserving winners of the first-ever Extreme E round. Team owner Rosberg hailed his drivers, saying: "Johan's performance was really inspiring and amazing to watch. I'm proud to watch from the outside. Damn stressful on one end, but very proud on the other way to see that amazing action on track."

"I'm just so thankful to Molly for driving so fantastically throughout the weekend. Not a single mistake out there. I'm very thankful, Molly, that you accepted to join our team."

The 2016 Formula 1 world champion's jubilance only briefly dipped once when he was asked in good humour during the press conference whether he'd already ➤

TACKLING EXTREME E'S DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Richard Washington should be cherished by Extreme E. He's the only person who comes close to allaying scepticism about why this championship has chosen to dock in Saudi Arabia and what lasting impact it might have; doubts enhanced by reports that the country has spent "at least \$1.5 billion" on high-profile sporting events to bolster its reputation.

The professor of climate science at the University of Oxford accepted the offer to join the Extreme E scientific committee within "30 seconds" of reading the email. He was convinced by the tandem Legacy projects that aim to benefit the environments where rounds are held.

When Extreme E co-founder and ex-Member of European Parliament Alejandro Agag is asked to justify why we're in Saudi, the evasive reply is 'we don't mix sports with politics'.

Fortunately, Washington has a more satisfying answer. "We can say to Saudi, 'You can keep all that money we should have taxed and didn't, or we can work together and use that resource to move things forward,'" he says. "They have the resource, and that needs to be ploughed back." The country owes a debt. On the critical point of human rights violations, he equates doing nothing about the climate crisis to being a major breach all of its own.

The chief component of the Legacy project carried out by Extreme E in Saudi was a beach clean. Autosport collected, among other things, a rusty knife and plastic water bottles accidentally dropped by other members of the landing party. Drivers Carlos Sainz Sr and Sara Price were particularly hands on, others content with perfecting their 'selfie'.

What irked more was the 100 or so

people on the beach, Autosport included, being ferried there by a fleet of GMC Yukon and Chevrolet Tahoe SUVs. The most frugal engine option is a 5.3-litre V8. The case that it's more environmentally friendly simply not to race in the first place only strengthens.

Washington again has a convincing reply. He kindly compresses his immense knowledge into the understandable: "There is a cost to the evolution process. To make an omelette you do need to break eggs. We do break eggs. We make omelettes too."

There are still questions over the long-term and beneficial impact Extreme E will have on that beach, although an ongoing fund has been established. Also, although round one is barely done and dusted, it seems logical for the series to visit each location only once to spread its help far and wide. For another day, that raises questions over how many years Extreme E can last, given the limited places that can accommodate the 334ft RMS St Helena 'floating paddock'.

Where Washington is most conclusive is with the exposure Extreme E will gain. He remarks that he's spoken to more journalists in this one trip than in the rest of his career. Further, he reckons his papers are cited 10 or so times at best, each from fellow academics who already share his way of thinking. Extreme E offers a platform to potentially engage team owner Lewis Hamilton's 6.2 million Twitter followers. Even a fraction of those doing their bit for sustainability has a far greater benefit.

On the trip, it's only Washington who offers that context, that sound reasoning. His voice is essential in validating so much of what Extreme E is built around.



Washington is key to Extreme E's message



Nine-time WRC champion Loeb and Gutierrez took third for seven-time F1 champ Hamilton



fired a text to Hamilton to remind him of the result. The answer was a firm “No”.

Behind Munnings (who will have gained many fans thanks to a starring role in qualifying, when she delivered a competitive lap time in spite of a massive right-rear blowout), Cristina Gutierrez wrestled the recalcitrant X44 car to the finish. At 1m38s adrift of RXR, it was a frustratingly subdued end to a weekend in which the team only made one mistake: when Loeb dropped off line as he climbed a dune to cost himself six seconds in qualifying.

Although Sainz and team-mate Laia Sanz’s event was done as early as 0745 on Sunday, the Spanish combo walked away with a sound fourth place. Only RXR and X44, first and second, could progress from the opening semi-final into the afternoon climax, leaving the big red-and-white Acciona machine to sit in the team’s khaki tent. But Sainz still had an axe to grind, showing Autosport the gouge that had been carved out of his car’s right-rear quarter panel. In that semi-final, he had squeezed Loeb to the inside of the course before the pair collided. He bent down and kindly drew out the moment in the sand. The double World Rally champion wasn’t done there. Unsettled by some elements, chiefly a lack of visibility and the

high-speed track design, he held the championship organisers back after class on Saturday night for a few hours.

“My input is ‘I want to be positive,’ he said. “I will try to help the championship. It’s not the time to criticise. Another time. It’s the time to learn and the time to really understand what is the best option.”

But as another accomplished and trophy-winning driver told Autosport while awaiting return PCR tests, the top brass seems more willing to listen than to actually put those lessons into practice.

Jenson Button and co-driver Mikaela Ahlin-Kottulinsky acquitted themselves well given their lack of off-road exposure and that the JBXE car was only delivered to the team’s British GT engineers on the Tuesday prior to the event. But much of their fate – they ended in sixth behind the trouble-free Hispano Suiza team of Oliver Bennett and Christine Giampaoli Zonca – lay beyond their control. Ahlin-Kottulinsky was hit by the same pit speed-limiter fault as RXR, costing a three-minute penalty in qualifying. Persistent invertor and motor gremlins meant full replacements after Button was forced to run with an 8% power loss on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the pre-event Ganassi promise never materialised after two

massive shunts for LeDuc, the last of which came as he blasted downhill and lost control of the car to collect Hurtgen, who admitted herself that she was taking things gingerly as she reached the site of her Saturday crash in which she rolled four times. With a third of a lap remaining and plenty of speed in hand, LeDuc should have bided his time in what was ultimately a battle for only seventh place. An undeterred Hurtgen rather astonishingly came away from Saudi with only a bitten tongue to show for her and Abt Cupra’s torrid weekend.

Things were little better for Veloce Racing. Jamie Chadwick flew out for 10 days, including a 72-hour quarantine stint in a hotel room, to complete only one shakedown lap as co-driver Stephane



Strong and eclectic mix of drivers stepped up for inaugural event



RESULTS ROUND 1/5, DESERT X PRIX, ALULA (SAU), 4 APRIL (FINAL)

POS	DRIVERS	TEAM	TIME
1	Johan Kristoffersson (SWE) Molly Taylor (AUS)	Rosberg X Racing	11m29.000s
2	Timmy Hansen (SWE) Catie Munnings (GBR)	Andretti United	11m52.736s
3	Cristina Gutierrez (ESP) Sebastien Loeb (FRA)	X44	13m07.098s

SEMI-FINAL

POS	DRIVERS	TEAM	TIME
1	Kristoffersson/Taylor	Rosberg X Racing	11m12.950s
2	Gutierrez/Loeb	X44	11m41.860s
3	Carlos Sainz (ESP) Laia Sanz (ESP)	Acciona Sainz	12m19.778s

Top two finishers move into the Desert X Prix Final.

CRAZY RACE

POS	DRIVERS	TEAM	TIME
1	Hansen/Munnings	Andretti United	11m30.564s
2	Oliver Bennett (GBR) Christine Giampaoli Zonca (ITA)	Hispano Suiza	12m00.906s
3	Jenson Button (GBR) Mikaela Ahlin-Kottulinsky (SWE)	JBXE	12m37.226s

First place finisher for the Crazy Race earns a spot in the Desert X Prix Final.

SHOOTOUT

POS	DRIVERS	TEAM	TIME
1	Mattias Ekstrom (SWE) Claudia Hurtgen (DEU)	Abt Cupra	5m07.187s
2	Sara Price (USA) Kyle LeDuc (USA)	Chip Ganassi Racing	5m28.903s
3	Jamie Chadwick (GBR) Stephane Sarrazin (FRA)	Veloce Racing	-

Decides the final points positions for 7th, 8th and 9th places.

QUALIFYING 1 1 Kristoffersson/Taylor 10m45.565s; 2 Gutierrez/Loeb 10m48.067s; 3 Sainz/Sanz 11m16.231s;
4 Hansen/Munnings 11m31.603s; 5 Button/Ahlin-Kottulinsky 12m22.426s; 6 Bennett/Zonca 13m09.038s; 7 Price/LeDuc 13m33.674s;
R Ekstrom/Hurtgen accident; **R** Chadwick/Sarrazin accident.

QUALIFYING 2 1 Gutierrez/Loeb 11m07.931s; 2 Sainz/Sanz 11m20.864s;
3 Hansen/Munnings 11m32.931s; 4 Bennett/Zonca 12m01.694s;
5 Kristoffersson/Taylor 12m03.258s; 6 Button/Ahlin-Kottulinsky 14m28.452s; DNS Price/LeDuc power steering; DNS Ekstrom/Hurtgen repairs not completed; DNS Chadwick/Sarrazin roll cage damage.

CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Kristoffersson/Taylor 35; 2 Gutierrez/Loeb 30;
3 Hansen/Munnings 28; 4 Sainz/Sanz 26; 5 Bennett/Zonca 20;
6 Ahlin-Kottulinsky/Button 17; 7 Ekstrom/Hurtgen 13;
8 LeDuc/Price 12; 9 Chadwick/Sarrazin 8.

NEXT RACE

OCEAN X-PRIX (SENEGAL) 3 JUNE ISSUE

Next time out the focus of the new electric racing series turns to marine ecosystems, as the floating paddock drops anchor on the far west of Africa.

Sarrazin rolled. After clipping a deceptively stubborn patch of camel grass, the machine flipped. The car's radio antenna was blasted into the roll cage during the impact and was deemed irreparable in the eyes of championship technical director Renato Moscati (at the time of writing, gently snoring next to Autosport during the airport transfer).

There wasn't quite a sensation like the last-lap airborne shunt between Nick Heidfeld and Nicolas Prost in the 2014 Beijing E-Prix that put the inaugural Formula E race on the map. But as a spectacle, and with the storyline of the reigning F1 champion's team beaten by two others, Extreme E enjoyed a better start to life.

Asked how he felt in the hours after the first Extreme E round, compared to the Formula E debut six and a half years earlier, Agag said: "It feels almost identical for me. I have the same feeling today after the race as I had in Beijing. The first weekend will have a huge influence on how Extreme E evolves.

"It's been beyond my wildest expectations. It's been the best weekend I can think of. I would not have come up with a better script than what happened here the last two days. We have really made our name proud. This is extreme racing."

He's not too far wide of the mark at all. Alejandro, when you leave Saudi territory, have a beer legally. You've earned it. ■

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Nojiri and Mugen begin the season in style

SUPER FORMULA
FUJI (JPN)
4 APRIL
ROUND 1/7

Mugen Honda ace Tomoki Nojiri staked an early claim to the Super Formula title with a textbook drive to victory in last weekend's Fuji Speedway season opener.

The 31-year-old converted pole position into his fourth career win – his third in nine starts – ahead of junior Honda colleagues Toshiki Oyu and Nirei Fukuzumi, who delivered the manufacturer a podium lockout to kick off the new season.

From second on the grid, Oyu seized the initiative at the start and built an early two-second lead, but Nojiri soon reeled in the Nakajima Racing sophomore, and on lap 10 of 41 he took back the advantage with a round-the-outside pass at the downhill Turn 10 right-hander.

Nojiri's main challenge thereafter was

maintaining his composure when it started to spit with rain with around 10 laps to go, before he had served his mandatory pitstop. Luckily for Nojiri, the rain never intensified enough to warrant wet-weather tyres, and he emerged from his pitstop with two laps remaining with a small buffer over Oyu.

Pre-season-testing pacesetter Oyu had slipped to fourth before making his pitstop, behind the Dandelion Racing cars of Fukuzumi and Ukyo Sasahara, who was deputising for an unwell Tadasuke Makino. Oyu recovered to second, just 1.6s away from Nojiri at the chequered flag after setting the fastest lap of the race on the final tour.

A slow pitstop for Sasahara consigned him to fifth place behind the best of the Toyota runners, Team Impul driver Ryo Hirakawa, who said it was impossible to challenge the Honda-powered cars owing to their top-speed advantage in the relatively cool conditions.

Reigning champion Naoki Yamamoto



WEEKEND WINNERS

SUPER FORMULA

FUJI (JPN)
Tomoki Nojiri
Team Mugen (Dallara-Honda)



For full results visit motorsportstats.com

endured a turbulent first weekend back with Nakajima Racing, but salvaged a respectable sixth place from a lowly 16th on the grid. Following a qualifying performance he labelled "hopeless" and "pathetic", Yamamoto seemed to find some extra speed on race day as he topped final practice and warm-up. The three-time title winner got his pitstop out of the way early and showed impressive race pace, and could have finished higher up the order if not for some tardy Nakajima pitwork.

TOM'S Super Formula newcomer Ritomo Miyata won the battle of the rookies in seventh place, and ended up as the second best of the Toyota-powered drivers, ahead of KCMG man Yuji Kunimoto.

Tatiana Calderon had cause to celebrate on Saturday as she escaped Q1 for the first time, but come race day she wound up in 13th, not helped by her radio not working.

Last year's Fuji winner Sho Tsuboi (Inging) threw away a probable top-six finish when he got on a kerb and spun in the final sector amid the late rain.

JAMIE KLEIN



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Quartararo stakes his claim for Yamaha

MOTOGP
LOSAIL (QAT)
4 APRIL
ROUND 2/19

After being confined to the Doha desert for the best part of a month, much of the MotoGP paddock is sick of the sight of the Losail International Circuit. The small contingent of the pitlane who'd probably be quite happy to stick around a little longer will be Yamaha, which completed a Qatar double in the Doha Grand Prix.

Maverick Vinales's Qatar GP win of the previous weekend proved that the Vinales of old is very much alive and well, and in doing so he put pressure on new team-mate Fabio Quartararo, who was fifth after riding "like a rookie" during the season opener. But in the Doha GP, the hotshot youngster who'd been deemed worthy of ousting nine-time grand prix world champion Valentino Rossi from his factory Yamaha seat, despite his 2020 title charge coming to a wretched end over the final rounds, arrived back from the wilderness.

The first 17 tours of the 22-lap Doha GP belonged to Pramac Ducati rookie Jorge Martin, who had seized a sensational maiden MotoGP pole position on Saturday. Quartararo and Vinales were once again swallowed up by the fast-starting Ducatis around them, while the KTM of Miguel Oliveira and Brad Binder shot up from 12th and 18th to move the Yamaha pair back to the outer reaches of the top 10.

Quartararo faded to as low as ninth in the early stages, but was not cast adrift. The pace being set by Martin wasn't slow, but



the abundance of track time the field had enjoyed in Qatar over the past month meant the top 10 remained bunched. Once both Yamahas had settled into the searing rhythm that had sketched them out as race threats in FP4, they began their charge forward.

Quartararo proved to be the quicker of the pair, working his way into the podium places on lap 17 after Ducati's Francesco Bagnaia ran wide at Turn 1. Quartararo then mugged fellow Frenchman Johann Zarco's Pramac Ducati at Turn 10 a lap later, before scything past Martin at Turn 15.

The power of the Ducati proved too much for Quartararo to defend against as the lead group thundered across the line to start lap 19. Then his decisive move came at Turn 4, from which point he began a march that allowed him to stretch his lead to 1.457 seconds come the chequered flag to win as the top 15 riders were covered by just 8.9s!

A mistake late on denied Vinales the

opportunity to double Yamaha's delight, but fifth after what he dubbed a 'bad race' puts him level on points with his team-mate, and sets up an intriguing dynamic heading to the next round in Portugal.

Zarco got the better of rookie team-mate Martin on the last lap to seal second and take a four-point lead in the championship, as well as completing the first ever 1-2 for French riders in premier-class MotoGP competition. The Pramac pair's form is asking some serious questions about Ducati's factory team line-up. Bagnaia faded to sixth due to his "unacceptable" errors, while Jack Miller was once again ninth after escaping punishment for a near-200km/h collision with world champion Joan Mir on the pit straight on lap 13. Mir is under no illusions that this was an "intentional" clash – the Suzuki rider had touched Miller earlier at Turn 10 with an on-the-limit move for which he immediately



RESULTS ROUND 2/19, LOSAIL (QAT), 4 APRIL (22 LAPS - 73.545 MILES)

POS	RIDER	TEAM	TIME
1	Fabio Quartararo (FRA)	Yamaha	42m23.997s
2	Johann Zarco (FRA)	Pramac Ducati	+1.457s
3	Jorge Martin (ESP)	Pramac Ducati	+1.500s
4	Alex Rins (ESP)	Suzuki	+2.088s
5	Maverick Vinales (ESP)	Yamaha	+2.110s
6	Francesco Bagnaia (ITA)	Ducati	+2.642s
7	Joan Mir (ESP)	Suzuki	+4.868s
8	Brad Binder (ZAF)	KTM	+4.979s
9	Jack Miller (AUS)	Ducati	+5.365s
10	Aleix Espargaro (ESP)	Aprilia	+5.382s
11	Enea Bastianini (ITA)	Avintia Ducati	+5.550s
12	Franco Morbidelli (ITA)	Petronas Yamaha SRT	+5.787s
13	Pol Espargaro (ESP)	Honda	+6.063s
14	Stefan Bradl (DEU)	Honda	+6.453s
15	Miguel Oliveira (PRT)	KTM	+8.928s
16	Valentino Rossi (ITA)	Petronas Yamaha SRT	+14.246s
17	Takaaki Nakagami (JPN)	LCR Honda	+16.241s
18	Luca Marini (ITA)	Avintia Ducati	+16.472s
19	Danilo Petrucci (ITA)	Tech3 KTM	+16.779s
20	Lorenzo Savadori (ITA)	Aprilia	+38.775s
R	Alex Marquez (ESP)	LCR Honda	12 laps-accident
R	Iker Lecuona (ESP)	Tech3 KTM	12 laps-accident

WEEKEND WINNERS

MOTO2

LOSAIL (QAT)

Sam Lowes
Marc VDS Racing
(Kalex)

MOTO3

LOSAIL (QAT)

Pedro Acosta (below)
Ajo Motorsport
(KTM)



Rossi's woes continued:
started 21st, finished 16th

apologised. Miller was also hit with arm-pump in the closing stages.

Mir's dramas meant seventh was all he could manage, with Suzuki team-mate Alex Rins fourth after losing touch with the podium fight late on following a strong start.

All KTM riders were forced into running the medium front tyre. Binder secured eighth, despite being "scared" of using a tyre he crashed on three times in the test. A dashboard blackout for Oliveira dropped him to 15th by the flag.

Pol Espargaro was a podium threat, although "two big mistakes" late on dropped him to 13th. The Honda rider is convinced he has the form to fight for the 2021 title, but is unhappy with his "disgusting" Qatar race results.

We can only imagine what Petronas SRT Yamaha rider Valentino Rossi truly thinks of his non-score in 16th following his career-worst 21st in qualifying. After his factory replacement romped to victory on the same bike, how long can he continue to justify elongating his racing career?

LEWIS DUNCAN

Winner's average speed 104.073mph. Fastest lap Bagnaia 1m54.491s, 105.114mph.

QUALIFYING 2 1 **Martin** 1m53.106s; 2 **Zarco** 1m53.263s; 3 **Vinales** 1m53.267s; 4 **Miller** 1m53.303s; 5 **Quartararo** 1m53.469s; 6 **Bagnaia** 1m53.654s; 7 **A Espargaro** 1m53.705s; 8 **Rins** 1m53.745s; 9 **Mir** 1m53.785s; 10 **Morbidelli** 1m53.794s; 11 **Bradl** 1m54.224s; 12 **Oliveira** 1m55.096s.

QUALIFYING 1 **Mir** 1m53.931s; **Oliveira** 1m54.220s; 13 **Marini** 1m54.228s; 14 **Marquez** 1m54.261s; 15 **P Espargaro** 1m54.402s; 16 **Nakagami** 1m54.481s; 17 **Petrucci** 1m54.528s; 18 **Binder** 1m54.555s; 19 **Bastianini** 1m54.632s; 20 **Lecuona** 1m54.731s; 21 **Rossi** 1m54.881s; 22 **Savadori** 1m55.823s.

RIDERS' CHAMPIONSHIP 1 **Zarco** 40; 2 **Quartararo** 36; 2 **Vinales** 36; 4 **Bagnaia** 26; 5 **Rins** 23; 6 **Mir** 22; 7 **Martin** 17; 8 **A Espargaro** 15; 9 **Miller** 14; 10 **P Espargaro** 11; 11 **Bastianini** 11; 12 **Binder** 10; 13 **Bradl** 7; 14 **Rossi** 4; 15 **Morbidelli** 4; 16 **Oliveira** 4; 17 **Marini** 0; 18 **Lecuona** 0; 19 **Nakagami** 0; 20 **Savadori** 0; 21 **Petrucci** 0.

MANUFACTURERS' CHAMPIONSHIP 1 **Yamaha** 50; 2 **Ducati** 40; 3 **Suzuki** 26; 4 **Aprilia** 15; 5 **Honda** 11; 6 **KTM** 11.



Zarco (left) leads table after two second places

NEXT REPORT

PORTUGUESE GP
22 APRIL ISSUE

KTM won at the Algarve Circuit last year. Can it repeat that feat, or will Ducati make the most of its raw pace to end Yamaha's fine start to the 2021 campaign? And when will Marc Marquez return?

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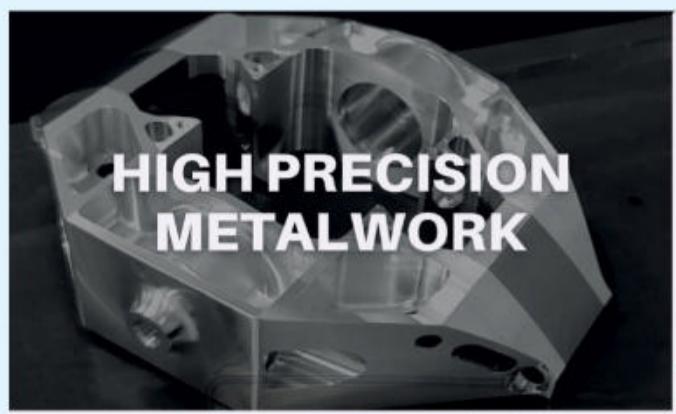
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- High attention to detail
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- An understanding of CAM (ideally Hyper Mill Open Mind) would be useful but it is not essential.
- Previous experience in manufacturing high precision components, pattern work and tooling, preferably in a motorsport (especially F1) or aerospace would be beneficial
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- Assume any responsibilities and duties delegated by the Head of Vehicle Science or their designee.

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STRONG INTEREST AS ENGLISH RACING BEGINS

CLUB RACING

Organisers have reported strong levels of interest resulting in bumper grids as the delayed English motorsport season got under way last weekend.

Pent-up demand from competitors led to some large entries, with the 750 Motor Club attracting 46 cars for its Club Enduro contest, 40 for the MX-5 Cup and 37 for the combined CALM All Porsche Trophy and Bernie's V8s field at its Donington Park opener on Monday, despite lingering coronavirus restrictions. The 7 Race Series attracted 56 drivers for the MotorSport Vision Racing meeting at Oulton Park, meaning it was split over two grids, while Hot Hatch led the way for the Castle Combe Racing Club on 28.

Even the Masters Historic Racing event at Donington Park, which traditionally benefits from an influx of European entries that were unable to take part this time, still featured some impressive grid sizes. The Gentleman Drivers GT race attracted 41 cars and the pre-'66 Touring Cars 31.

750MC competitions manager Giles Groombridge believes that club motorsport has been able to avoid the worst of the economic impact of the pandemic, but did point out that many of its categories that were racing at Donington are traditionally well-supported.

"I think club motorsport has been quite resilient to it," he said. "COVID has hurt certain areas of the

economy far worse than others – hospitality, retail being two examples. But we don't have a significant amount of competitors who work in those industries.

"There is certainly an element of pent-up demand and I think we're in a slightly strange situation where motorsport is one of the few activities that people are able to go out and do. At the moment people aren't booking foreign holidays, they're not getting married, they're not going to restaurants, weekends away – all that kind of stuff that takes people's time and finances is not available, which is to the benefit of motorsport. So, I think to some extent we're riding a sort of crest of a wave, and how long it continues I don't know."

The strong entries were not quite universal across the four English Easter race meetings, but just two categories had fewer than 16 starters.

Capacity fields are also expected for the Classic Sports Car Club fixture at Oulton this weekend. As Autosport closed for press on Tuesday, three of the six grids were full with reserves, while another two had fewer than four spaces remaining. The CSCC is reporting very strong interest across all three events it currently has available for competitors to book.

"Oulton has 235 entries and the next one is Thruxton and that's growing on 286, while Donington has gone crazy," said club director David Smithersam. "It's nearly two months away but we've got 378 entries already."

MARK PAULSON & STEPHEN LICKORISH

Rallycross ace Ovenden to circuits

MINI CHALLENGE

Junior Rallycross ace Tom Ovenden believes learning the circuits will be his toughest task as he swaps disciplines to compete in the Cooper class of the Mini Challenge this year.

Ovenden, the son of multiple rallycross title winner Tristan, began competing in autograss before winning the junior title in both BTRDA Clubmans and British Rallycross last year. The 16-year-old now joins the Excelr8 Motorsport squad as he makes his first foray into circuit racing.

"I think the most difficult thing as I make the switch from British Rallycross to circuit racing is going to be learning all the new circuits, but joining an



experienced and well-established team like Excelr8 will hopefully give me the best chance of success, and will help me get up to speed quickly," said Ovenden.

"I'm always aiming to get on the podium as soon as I can, but I know that this will be difficult and will require a lot of hard work. However, I'm ready for this new challenge."

Ovenden is among a capacity entry for the Cooper class, which is due to have its first round at Snetterton later this month.



MX-5 racers in Ginetta switch

GINETTA GT4 SUPERCUP

A trio of Mazda MX-5 Supercup racers are set to contest their first full seasons in the Ginetta GT4 Supercup with AK Motorsport this year.

Former MX-5 champion James Blake-Baldwin made one-off Ginetta appearances with the squad in both 2019 and 2020, taking a best result of fifth. He will be joined by fellow MX-5 regulars Jack Sycamore and Garry Townsend in moving to the British Touring Car support series, while regular Am class frontrunner Carl Garnett will also continue with AK.

"We've made good progress in the championship over the past three years, and we want to push on in 2021," said team manager Anthony Kane. "Moving up to a four-car line-up is great for us, and we've got a brilliant group of talented, successful racers who will all benefit from having team-mates to work alongside."

Meanwhile, Xentek Motorsport has revealed its Ginetta GT5 Challenge drivers for the season ahead. Podium finishers Conner Garlick and Josh Steed (who only contested one 2020 event) will be back, while former Compact Cup racer Mikey Doble will make his series debut.

RACE WINNER MARTIN STAYS IN CARRERA CUP

PORSCHE CARRERA CUP GB

Porsche Carrera Cup GB race winner Will Martin will continue in the series for a second season this year with the Richardson Racing squad.

The 2019 Ginetta Junior title contender was one of the stars of the second half of the Carrera Cup season, taking a win at Thruxton and five other podiums. He is now looking to continue those impressive performances into the new campaign.

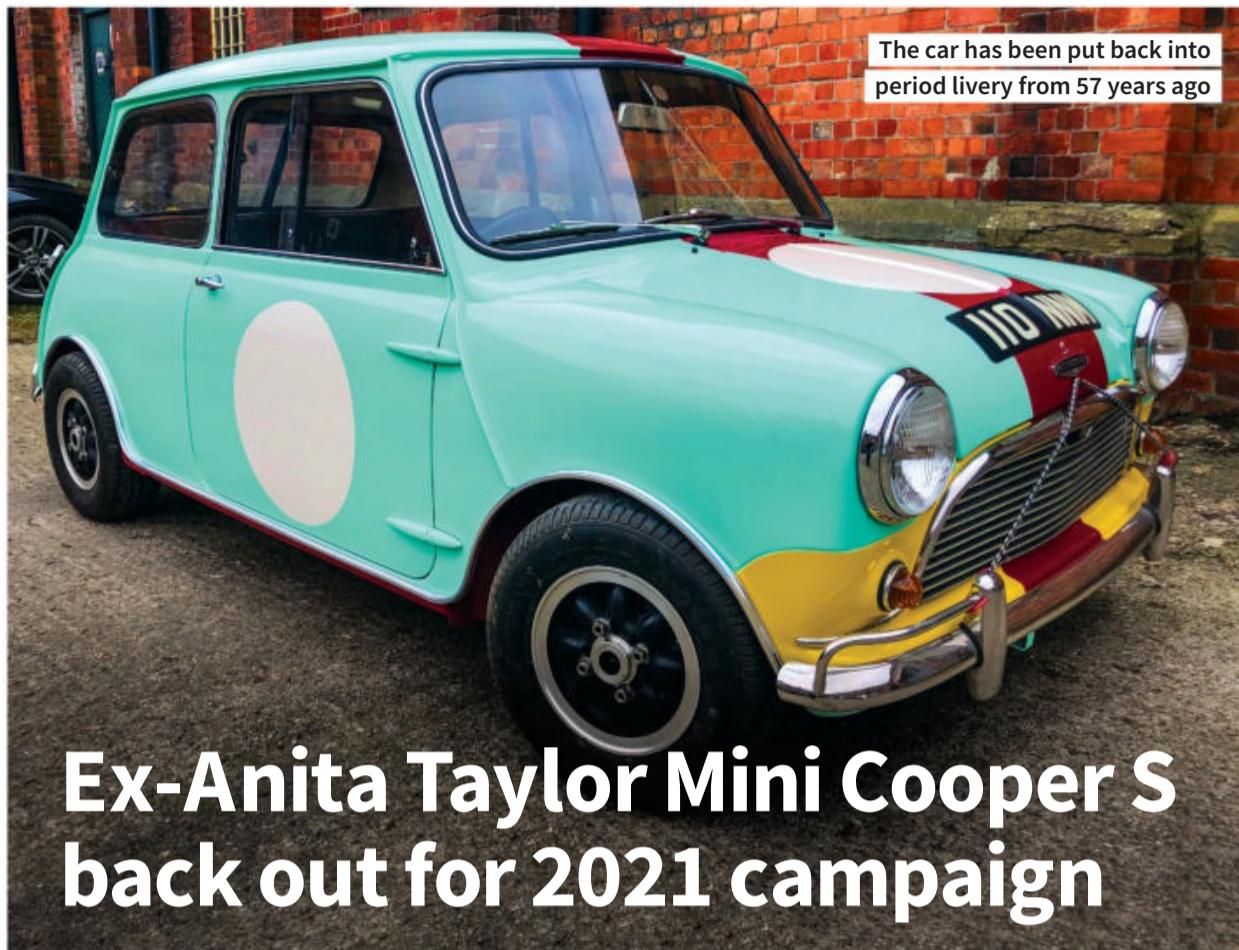
"In our first year in the series, we made huge progress across the season as we learned more and more about the car, and we ended the year in a very strong position," said Martin (below). "The aim now is to carry that form through into the new season, and our goal has to be to fight for the title."

"It certainly won't be easy as there are some high-calibre drivers joining the grid and I feel the level of competition is going to be greater than last year, but I'm ready for the challenge and can't wait for the start of the season."

Elsewhere, Porsche Sprint Challenge GB racers Theo Edgerton and Ethan Hawkey will both remain in the Cayman-based series this year. Edgerton will continue with Total Control Racing, with which he took a win at last year's Silverstone season finale, while fellow former Ginetta Junior driver Hawkey stays at Redline Racing.

Charles March, son of the Duke of Richmond, will contest a full campaign in the Am class after making his debut at Silverstone last year.





Ex-Anita Taylor Mini Cooper S back out for 2021 campaign

HISTORICS

The early Mini Cooper S initially raced by Anita Taylor, and which subsequently won its class in the 1965 Snetterton 500 in the hands of David Wansborough and Gerry Marshall, is set to return to competition this season.

Prepared for Taylor to contest the 1964 British Saloon Car Championship, initially in 1071cc specification, the Mini is back in

South Yorkshire where the Taylor family's Aurora Gears Company was based, and being fettled for owner Peter Flanagan to use in speed events.

One of two supplied to brother and sister Trevor and Anita Taylor by Douglas Wilson-Spratt, '110 NNM' had an engine from Wiltshire tuning ace Daniel Richmond's Downton Engineering. It was painted in Aurora Gear (Racing) turquoise with a crimson stripe, which

will now be used again, 57 years later.

Anita debuted the car at Goodwood and raced it all over the country, including in the British Grand Prix-supporting race at Brands Hatch. During the season, a 1275cc engine was fitted to match former Team Lotus F1 racer Trevor's machine.

While Anita switched to the British Racing Drivers' School's Cooper S in 1965, Robbie Gordon bought her first Mini. Relivered in gunmetal and maroon and fielded under the Newtune banner, it put Marshall on the radar at Snetterton.

The late rollbar pioneer John Aley bought the Mini in 1966, changing its colour to Cirrus White. Mini fan Flanagan is researching its subsequent history, and has evidence of British Automobile Racing Club Forward Trust Special Saloon Championship action in 1977. Thereafter it was laid up in a Leicester garage for 20 years.

When disinterred by a previous owner, the Mini still had its original shell and Aurora documentation. Remarkably, its history was supported by automotive archaeology as its warpaint layers were exposed during restoration, plus evidence of a long-range fuel tank's fitment.

Flanagan, who sold his ex-Janspeed Unipower GT to buy the Mini last year, is delighted with its period look.

"It's too far from current [Motorsport UK roll cage] spec to race, but I'm planning to sprint and hillclimb it," he said. "Hopefully we'll be out in the Mini Festival I'm co-organising at Prescott on 22 May."

MARCUS PYE

Blakeney marks 35 years since race debut at Combe

FF1600

Pat Blakeney celebrated 35 years to the day since his race debut, driving a Formula Ford 2000 Royale RP27 in a Monoposto race at Castle Combe, by returning to the circuit's FF1600 Championship last Monday.

Since selling the FF2000 Delta that he shared with son Scott at Silverstone's Historic Sports Car Club Finals last October, Blakeney – who manages the motorsport



collected it last week," said Blakeney who, after taking a best result of 11th on Monday, intends to do as many Combe rounds as possible.

Asked why he had bought a car for which there are no races at Thruxton this year, Blakeney said: "Exactly that. I'm too busy in my day job at Thruxton to compete there, so I opted for something we can enjoy as a family team elsewhere, as and when time allows."

MARCUS PYE

content at Thruxton – has bought the Medina Sport Van Diemen JL13 in which Wayne Boyd won the 2015

Formula Ford Festival.

"Peter Alexander had bought the car, originally to run a customer in, but we

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Changes to the engines
won't be for next year



READ

Planning under way for Junior Saloons to adopt hybrid power

JSCC

Junior Saloon Car Championship organisers are working on plans to introduce hybrid power to the series.

The Citroen Saxo-based contest is working with a British Touring Car Championship team on the proposals, along with two other electric vehicle companies. No firm date has yet been set for when the hybrid system will be introduced.

"We're not doing it next year, but we are going to do it," said championship coordinator Dave Beecroft. "This is the way the world is going and youngsters, as soon as they pass their test, will be

driving hybrid and electric vehicles. It won't involve a change in car — we're not going to an electric Hyundai."

It is understood that the system will be similar to the one planned for the BTCC where, from next year, an additional burst of extra hybrid power will be used by drivers when attacking or defending. More details about the JSCC's plans will be announced in the coming months.

Meanwhile, the championship has been forced to move its scholarship day from Pembrey to the Stafford Driving Centre amid continuing coronavirus restrictions in Wales. It will still take place next Tuesday (13 April).

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Neal to defend crown as Merc joins

TOURING CAR TROPHY

Henry Neal will bid for a second successive Touring Car Trophy title in his Team Dynamics Honda Civic Type R FK2 this season.

The son of three-time British Touring Car champion Matt Neal won four out of seven races last year, but will face more competition this season in the wake of another flurry of



HAWKINS

recent driver announcements.

Dynamics may yet run a second Civic, but there will definitely be at least one other NGTC-spec machine on the grid, with former Ginetta GT4 Supercup and VW Cup driver Darren Lewis piloting a Mercedes A-Class run by Team Hard (below, left). Lewis made a one-off TCT appearance in the team's Volkswagen CC in 2019, scoring a best finish of fourth.

"I couldn't have asked for a better run in the Touring Car Trophy last year," said Neal. "There's going to be a bigger and stronger field this year but I like a challenge and I can't wait to see how I get on against the increased competition."

Also returning to the championship are Trade Price Cars BTCC team boss Dan Kirby, who claimed pole for last year's opening round at Oulton Park, and former rally driver Will Butler. Both will pilot SEAT Cupra TCRs run by Power Maxed Racing.

MARK PAULSON

IN THE HEADLINES

SUPERKART WINNERS

The first Superkart silverware of the season was claimed at Darley Moor last weekend when it hosted the English Championship for the F250 National and F125 Open classes. Lee Plain won the first leg for the F250 National class, but in the second leg Kirk Cattermole snatched victory on the final corner to win by 0.09s. With the drivers tied on points, the verdict went in favour of Cattermole by dint of his better qualifying time. In the F125 Open class, Mark Bramhall had two easy wins to secure the E plate.

SMITH'S STEP UP IN FIESTAS

After contesting a few Fiesta races last year, 2017 European Le Mans Series GT champion Rob Smith is stepping up to the new Mk7 Fiesta ST180 Turbo class for 2021. "It's a great car, just like a little touring car," he said after testing at Oulton Park. Smith's 14-year-old son Sid will also be out again in his second season of Fiesta Junior racing.

'CHOCOLATE' CHEVRON

John Emberson gave the famous Chevron B26 'chocolate drop' its first UK race for several years last weekend at Donington Park when he ran the ex-works car in the Masters Historic Sports Car Championship. Raced in period for the Chevron factory by Brian Redman, Peter Gethin and John Watson, the brown livery gave the car its name. Its results included fourth in the world sportscar championship round at Brands Hatch in 1974, and it later won the British Sportscar Championship with Iain McLaren.

COCHRAN TESTS FF1600

Karting ace Ben Cochran, 16, had his first run in a Bernard Dolan Racing Van Diemen at Donington Park this week (below), as he prepares for his car racing debut in the National Formula Ford Championship. "I have never driven any of the circuits, so it's all new and I need time to get used to it," said the Cochran. Dolan will announce more drivers for the team soon.



SCHERER

Ainscough denied double win as MSVR season begins

MOTORSPORT VISION RACING

Richard Ainscough just missed out on a double win in the 7 Series Caterham 420R class as the popular MotorSport Vision Racing category was split across two grids for its season opener at Oulton Park last weekend.

Ainscough shook off Phil Jenkins early in the first encounter, and his race-long lead left him clear of a terrific battle for second to secure the win in a contest shortened by a red flag. Justin Heap swapped places with Jenkins, before Jake Swann Dixon split them. Jenkins beat Swann Dixon to second at the flag, while Heap dropped to fifth behind Anthony Barnes.

It was an eight-car train for much of race two, before Ainscough and Jenkins broke clear after six of the 16 laps. Both had a share of the lead, which allowed Heap to join them, but a late safety car made it a one-lap sprint to the flag. Heap took the spoils after his rivals fell over each other, with Jenkins recovering to second



Ainscough leads
Jenkins at Oulton

BOURNE

from Paul Thacker and Mark Stansfield.

Lewis Thompson was victorious in both 1600-division 7 Series races. He successfully saw off Andy Perry in race one after a fifth-lap safety car intervention. Erstwhile leader Perry dropped to fifth, but clawed his way back to fourth behind Jamie Winrow and Lee Collins.

Much of race two featured a duel between Thompson and Jay McCormack. While McCormack led the early laps, Thompson made the decisive move into

Island a lap from home, with Perry and Ben Winrow completing the top four.

In the non-Caterham races, Neil Patten's Van Diemen was a lights-to-flag winner in both Heritage Formula Ford 1600 encounters, after early pressure twice over from Chris Hodgen. Jon Woolfitt's Spire headed home brother Paul's Lotus Elise in both Northern Saloons & Sports Car races, but a jumped-start penalty reversed the race-two result.

PETER SCHERER

Porsche class champion Coleman steps up for '21

PORSCHE CLUB GB

Porsche Club GB Class 2 champion James Coleman will step up to Class 1 for this year's championship, which begins at Donington Park this Saturday.

Coleman, who took the

Class 2 crown at the wheel of a self-built Boxster last year, has constructed a new 3.4-litre Cayman for this year's campaign. He debuted the car in the CALM All Porsche Trophy and Bernie's V8s race at Donington last weekend, finishing fourth

among the Porsches.

"We've still got the Boxster," said Coleman. "It's an easy option to take the Boxster out in Class 2, but I want to be challenged.

"It doesn't feel any different [to drive]. It doesn't feel any quicker

but I haven't been in the car for six months! It's basically just a bigger engine, so you've got more power and these are lighter. The handling [should be better] as well – that's why we went for the Cayman."

MARK PAULSON

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The same but different

The new UK motorsport season finally got under way last weekend, albeit with continued COVID-19 restrictions. But that didn't prevent some great spectacles

MARCUS PYE

Here we go again. For the second successive season, the UK racing season has kicked off late, delayed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Last year, with scientists toiling to devise vaccines and the first national lockdown biting, Motorsport UK cancelled all event permits for the months of April, May and June. This time around, with more than 30 million people (towards half the population) having received at least one jab, we're in a better place, but by no means complacent. To be able to start motorsport in April, albeit behind closed doors, is therefore a privilege appreciated by many who were raring to go.

I worked at last July's Historic Sports Car Club Legends of Brands Hatch Super Prix event – one of the first meetings to be run to a stringent new set of protocols – and the sense of relief that it ran smoothly was palpable. Remote signing-on and scrutineering (with competitors signing self-declarations), masking of officials, social distancing, doctors on standby in medical cars (rather than marshals being first responders) and virtual programmes have now become the norm. We are also used to relying on live timing and detailed results published online, rather than basic rankings on paper.

Scroll forward nine months and what has changed? Not much to the onlooker, beyond marshals on posts being permitted to be more hands-on and general logistical requirements being routine to officials observing from on high. "We're understanding things

"Under sunny skies, a brisk tailwind supercharged cars down the Wheatcroft Straight"

better now, but getting through the programme smoothly and safely remains our priority," said MotorSport Vision Racing's Dave Scott at Donington Park on Friday, when the excellent Masters Historic Formula 1 weekend opened its 2021 programme under sunny skies, with a brisk tailwind supercharging cars down the Wheatcroft Straight past the pits.

Of course, the composition of the entry was different. With France going into total lockdown (and in the early stages of its vaccine rollout), cross-border travel bans for all but essential purposes and the necessity for non-elite international visitors to quarantine for 10 days on arrival in the UK, Donington's roster was almost entirely British-based, with the exception of a couple of overseas nationals who are domiciled here. Fortunately, the Masters grids – and a wonderful Formula 2 field – were still well populated.

While F1 cars of the later Cosworth DFV-engined era have long offered a wonderful flashback to world championship grands prix of the 1970s and early 1980s, they had rivals for aural pleasure in the form of the Masters Endurance Legends machinery. Six-year-old Nissan-engined BR Engineering BR01 LMP2 cars will not be historic for another decade or so, but the sound and fury of a trio of the re-engined 4.5-litre high-downforce closed-cockpit machines haring around the 1.979-mile circuit in a shade over 60 seconds, battling with Steve Tandy's svelte Lola-Judd – and young Max Lynn breaking a minute in Saturday qualifying – was hugely impressive. The contrast between the shrill engine note of the Judd V10-motivated Dallara and the thuggish deep-throated V8 in the US-built Riley & Scott was splendid. As were Mike Newton's MG-Lola, Oliver Bryant (wringing everything from his mighty tube-frame Roush Mustang), and a couple of rapid Porsches.

Nobody in the Masters Historic Sports Cars field could beat former Formula Ford 1600, Palmer Audi and Carrera Cup racer Tom Bradshaw, who piloted his Chevron B19 brilliantly, but versatile British Touring Car driver Jake Hill didn't hang around after a late call-up to compete in Simon Watts's Team Gunston B26. More V8s than I've seen in a Gentlemen Drivers GT race for a long while – TVR Griffiths, AC Cobras in original and Daytona Coupe guises, and Shelby Mustangs – squared up to a posse of Jaguar E-types in the model's 60th anniversary year, with nippy Lotus Elans and Ron 'Mr Masters' Maydon's twin-cam Ginetta G4R in the mix.

The HSCC, whose season starts at Snetterton in a fortnight's time – where Historic and Classic Formula Ford competitors will carry stickers in memory of local hero Jim Russell, the three-time Autosport national F3 champion-turned-race school king – subscribed to grids for its F2 'International' and Classic F3 series. Without the European stalwarts, the former lost its cosmopolitan flavour, but the pre-1979 cars are fantastic to behold, as they were in period. Donington hosted European championship rounds, won by Bruno Giacomelli (March-BMW 782P) and Keke Rosberg (Chevron-Hart B42) in 1977-78, and subsequently Derek Daly (March-BMW 792), Geoff Lees (Ralt-Honda RH6), Corrado Fabi (March-BMW 822), current circuit leaseholder Jonathan Palmer – the 1983 champion – and Roberto Moreno (Ralt-Honda RH6s).

How the season ahead will pan out remains anybody's guess but, with rumours gathering strength in the Donington paddock that the ACM had finally pulled the plug on the rescheduled-from-2020 Monaco GP Historique, and news awaited on the Goodwood Festival of Speed's viability, given that much of its content is imported or corporate-dependent, the historic scenes in all countries are looking increasingly likely to remain domestic throughout 2021. ■

→ P60 DONINGTON PARK MASTERS REPORT



Boltonians wander to masterful Donington wins

DONINGTON PARK MSVR MASTERS HISTORIC 2-3 APRIL

The season-opening Masters Historic Sports Car Championship encounter was ultimately a Bolton benefit as Bolton resident Tom Bradshaw won by three-quarters of a minute in the family's Bolton-built Chevron B19.

In the early stages, he'd run nip and tuck with the Lola T70 Mk3B of Alex Brundle in an absorbing contest, with the Chevron nibbling at the rear of the mighty Lola. Sadly, it was not destined to last and, just as a safety car period started, Brundle peeled the Lola off into the pits with a terminal gearbox problem.

From the green, ex-Formula Palmer Audi and Porsche racer Bradshaw took full advantage of the empty track ahead of him to blitz clear of the rest of the

pack and complete the perfect start to his title campaign.

In Bradshaw's wake, an absorbing three-way contest raged all the way to the flag. Jonathan Mitchell and Chris Beighton battled for second in another Chevron versus Lola contest initially, as up into fourth came British Touring Car ace Jake Hill, having taken over the Chevron B26 of Roberto Giordanelli.

As he became more accustomed with the car, Hill set a searing pace and hunted down his opponents. But, just as he got up alongside Mitchell on the run out of Redgate, the clutch gave out and Hill toured into retirement. Mitchell, meanwhile, battled back ahead of Beighton to grab second by two seconds at the flag.

Bradshaw's friend and fellow Boltonian Callum Grant took a superb win in the opening Historic Formula 2 contest. As others faltered, Grant drove a mighty race

aboard his March 79B to finish ahead of Frazer Gibney (Chevron B40). Later, in an enthralling contest, Andrew Smith (March 742) ripped through from the tail of the grid to win from Martin Stretton (712) and Grant – the trio covered by less than four seconds.

The Pearson brothers, Gary and John, claimed another Jaguar E-type victory in the 90-minute Gentleman Drivers' race, but it was never a straightforward affair. Just two weeks short of the 60th anniversary of the first E-type race win, Gary started in his brother's car, while Brundle started the race in Gary's machine.

Unfortunately, Brundle was again destined to non-finish, this time with a radiator problem. Instead, Gary concentrated on John's E-type and handed it over to his brother mid-race. Two safety car periods, one right from the start, interrupted proceedings and shuffled pitstop strategies. But, in the final sprint to the flag, John had enough in hand as Mike Whitaker's TVR Griffith and Mark Donnor's E-type, now in the hands of Scot Andrew Smith, chased hard. Though still recovering from a back injury, and clearly suffering by the finish, John did a fine job.

"I had to give myself a couple of laps off at one point to rest my back. But we made it," he said. Donnor and Smith were cruelly denied a place on the podium by a very late head-gasket failure, while Whitaker was left to rue the second safety car period when he and others lost out behind a very slow Alfa Romeo, which effectively operated as a second safety car.

In Classic Formula 3, wins were shared by F2 victor Andrew Smith and Conor Murphy.



DONINGTON PARK WEEKEND WINNERS

MASTERS HISTORIC SPORTS CARS

Tom Bradshaw (Chevron B19)

HISTORIC FORMULA 2

Race 1 Callum Grant (March 79B)
Race 2 Andrew Smith (March 742)

MASTERS GENTLEMAN DRIVERS

John and Gary Pearson (Jaguar E-type)

CLASSIC FORMULA 3

Race 1 Conor Murphy (March 803B)
Race 2 Andrew Smith (March 783)

MASTERS HISTORIC FORMULA 1

Races 1 & 2 Mike Cantillon (Williams FW07C)

MASTERS PRE-1966 TOURING CARS

Marcus Jewell/Ben Clucas (Ford Lotus Cortina)

MASTERS ENDURANCE LEGENDS

Race 1 Jack Dex (BR01, below)
Race 2 Steve Tandy (Lola-Judd B12/60)



For full results visit: tsl-timing.com

Murphy won the opener under pressure but retired from the second after Smith (March 783) had gone ahead when the March 803B started to misfire.

Mike Cantillon was the class of the opening Masters Historic Formula 1 field and won at a canter in his Williams FW07C as Steve Hartley gave valiant but ultimately fruitless chase in his McLaren MP4/1. Lukas Halusa was an impressive third in his older McLaren M23. Under constant pressure from Cantillon in the second race, Hartley looked to have overcome his rival until a moment on the brakes into the chicane with three laps to go allowed the Williams to nip ahead and take another win.

The combined pace of Marcus Jewell and Ben Clucas in the pre-1966 touring cars race kept their Lotus Cortina ahead of the V8 ranks, while the Masters Endurance Legends delivered two excellent races. Jack Dex (BR01) and Steve Tandy (Lola-Judd B12/60) ultimately emerged as the victors, but Dex faced a big early challenge in the opener from the similar cars of Max and Shaun Lynn. Dex and Max Lynn then chased Tandy relentlessly to the flag on Saturday but to no avail.

PAUL LAWRENCE



ROUSH MUSTANG RETURNS The mighty IMSA GT Ford Mustang of Oliver Bryant was a highlight in the Masters Endurance Legends race last Friday. The spectacular car was built by Roush Racing in 1995 and spent two seasons in IMSA as an entry by the Puerto Rico Ford concessionaire. Bryant last raced the car at Sebring in 2012, and until Friday it had not raced since. However, the 750bhp V8-engined Mustang has been to Goodwood twice in recent times in Bryant's hands. It was easily the fastest GT car in the Endurance Legends race and took seventh overall.



GOODWOOD VICTOR IN ACTION The 1964 Studebaker Lark Daytona is an unlikely racing saloon. However, Adrian Willmott and GT racer Mark Farmer took it to a very encouraging fifth in the pre-1966 touring car contest at Donington. The Lark, with its 4.3-litre V8 engine, was built up with Goodwood in mind and finished second in a St Mary's Trophy race in 2018 before Willmott shared it with Nicolas Minassian to victory last October. Now it is in the care of Jordan Racing and has been extensively reworked over the winter to run with Masters, albeit currently as an invitation class car.



SPIRIT OF THE TARGA FLORIO The stunning ex-Helmut Marko Alfa Romeo T33/TT/3 of Lukas Halusa made a tremendous sight in the Masters Historic Sports Car Championship race. The 1972 machine was a Targa Florio car for the works Autodelta team and remains in very original trim. In its later life it even raced in Greece for a while, but then came back to the UK and is now in the care of Sporting and Historic Car Engineers, the company that prepares it for the Halusa family. Powered by a three-litre V8 Alfa Romeo unit, Halusa claimed seventh place in the hour-long contest.

Short and Epps put on opening round thriller

DONINGTON PARK

750MC

5 APRIL

Perennial Mazda MX-5 Cup pacesetter Ben Short was given a thorough workout by series debutant Mike Epps as the 750 Motor Club season kicked off where it concluded last December.

The pair dominated the first encounter. They exchanged the lead – and some paint – on a couple of occasions, before Short eventually eased to a one-second win after former British Touring Car racer Epps missed a gear on the final lap.

Epps thought he'd turned the tables in race two only to be excluded post-race for having an underweight car. From eighth on the partially reversed grid, he had made the best of the first-lap skirmishes to run second, then quickly chased down leader Mike Comber, who had recovered to sixth in race one following a first-corner incident.

Boxed in as the pack negotiated the Craner Curves on lap one, Short had to settle for third on the road behind Comber, while Ben Hancy was promoted to his second podium of the day.



Drive of the day was arguably from Steve Foden. Narrowly defeated by Hancy in last year's championship, Foden climbed from row 19 of the grid to fifth on the road in race two, after retiring from the opening race with a recurrence of an intermittent misfire.

Stopping during a safety-car period at the start of the pit window enabled Carl Swift and Rob Baker to open their Club Enduro title defence in ideal fashion. Swift admitted to having to drive defensively in the early stages to keep Joe Lock's BMW E46 M3 GTR at bay after passing the polesitter on the outside line.

Hampered by a smaller fuel tank, the

BMW was approaching a minute in arrears of Baker's SEAT Leon Eurocup after Lock eventually relayed to Ash Hicklin under green-flag conditions. Hicklin demonstrated what might have been by reducing the gap to 3.8s at the flag, as Baker was hampered by tracking knocked askew by contact, while third-placed Chris Boardman also starred during his stint in the E36 M3 he shared with Adam Howarth.

Simon Walker-Hansell was denied Locost race one victory when he was penalised for not rejoining the track safely following a first-lap error at the Melbourne Hairpin. As a result, the polesitter's impressive recovery

White takes FF1600 double at Howard's Day event

CASTLE COMBE

CCRC

5 APRIL

Double-headers for each of Castle Combe's four resident categories thrilled viewers via livestreaming for Howard's Day, which opened the Wiltshire circuit's 2021 season.

None thrilled more so than Formula Ford, where Ollie White landed the only Easter Monday double after a mere 0.543 seconds blanketed the top five runners, each in

different chassis, during qualifying. Felix Fisher (Ray GR05) claimed pole for race one, with White (Medina Sport JL17K), reigning champion Luke Cooper (Swift SC18), championship debutant Ben Mitchell (Van Diemen RF99) and young Alex Walker (Spectrum 011) snapping at his heels.

All five were locked in combat from the moment the red lights went out, but it all came to a head when White squeezed bold outside challenger Mitchell onto the grass atop Avon Rise midway through the race.

Mitchell spun wildly, forcing Fisher into avoiding action, shooting over the grass on the right and just missing White as he exited Quarry, the Ray ending up in the barriers on the outside. White, Cooper and Walker thus finished 1-2-3, pursued by the recovering Mitchell. Seventh-placed Nathan Ward (Swift SC92) won Class B, and Richard Higgins pipped James Colborn by a length in Class C.

The sequel was sensational to behold but was without polesitter Fisher, whose car was too damaged to take the start. White, Cooper, Mitchell and Walker ran nose to tail throughout the 10-lap contest, with only 0.613s separating them at the flag. Ward stormed back from a hairy spin out of Camp on the first lap, hunting down Paul Barnes for B honours again. Steve Bracegirdle split Higgins and Colborn among the earlier cars.

Two breathless Saloon races brought battling and drama aplenty. With front-row starter Gary Prebble out due to a broken rear wheel after a sluggish getaway dropped him into the pack, Kevin Bird (Nissan



ROBERTS



ROBERTS

drive was rewarded only with sixth. Andrew Tait inherited the win in a typically frenetic race, benefiting from the chaos caused by Geoff Peek's last-lap spin across the track after dropping a wheel wide at McLeans. Walker-Hansell hit back with a win in race two, enjoying his tussle with Tait for the win after leader Martin West's mid-race mistake.

Driving the Radical PR6 that took his father to a pair of titles a decade ago, Joe Stables held off Scott Mittell's new machine to take a Bikesports double. Stables dived inside Mittell at Goddard's early on in race one, taking advantage of the pole winner's

struggles under braking in his eponymous MC-41RR, now fitted with a Suzuki Hayabusa engine. Losing his diffuser mid-race failed to hamper Stables in the safety car-shortened race two.

The combined CALM All Porsche Trophy and Bernie's V8 race was won by the TVR Tuscan of Matt Holben. After making a fast start from row three of the grid, Holben took advantage of the longer mandatory pitstop for leading Porsche runner Jonathan Evans (Cayman S) – owing to his pacesetting qualifying time – to move ahead in the pitstop sequence.

MARK PAULSON

WEEKEND WINNERS

DONINGTON PARK

MX-5 CUP

Race 1 Ben Short

Race 2 Mike Comber

CLUB ENDURO

Carl Swift/Rob Baker (SEAT Leon Eurocup)

LOCOST

Race 1 Andrew Tait

Race 2 Simon Walker-Hansell

BIKESPORTS

Races 1 & 2 Joe Stables (Radical PR6)

CALM ALL PORSCHE/BERNIE'S V8s

Matt Holben (TVR Tuscan)

CASTLE COMBE

CCRC FORMULA FORD 1600

Races 1 & 2 Ollie White (Medina Sport JL17K)

CCRC SALOONS

Race 1 Alex Kite (Audi TT)

Race 2 Simon Thornton-Norris (Mitsubishi Colt)

CCRC GTs

Race 1 Oliver Bull (Vauxhall Tigra Silhouette)

Race 2 Chris Everill (Ginetta G55)

CCRC HOT HATCH CHALLENGE

Race 1 Jordan Curnow (Honda Civic)

Race 2 Chris Southcott (Peugeot 205)

For full results visit: tsl-timing.com



JONES

200SX) and Alex Kite (Audi TT) flew ahead. Contact between them entering the Bobbies chicane spun Bird and delayed Kite, promoting Neil Greenland and polesitter Simon Thornton-Norris in a Mitsubishi Colt Ralliart shootout. Thornton-Norris slowed with ignition issues, whereupon Kite surged back before taking the lead and the win from class victor Greenland.

Early leader Prebble slowed dramatically two thirds of the way through the second race with a driveshaft failure, limping home a lapped ninth in his SEAT Leon Cupra. Thornton-Norris, having fixed his machine, took victory ahead of Kite and Greenland.

Unreliability blunted the GT encounters,



with Bradley John's Mitsubishi E9 breaking in the first, freeing Oliver Bull's Vauxhall Tigra Silhouette to win from Tony Bennett (Caterham R300). Alan Hamilton, finding unprecedented pace in his now wingless Duratec-motivated Westfield Aero, shadowed the reigning champion home.

Bull went grass-tracking avoiding John Moon's MG Midget-Vauxhall in race two, filling the Tigra's radiator with grass. Chris Everill's 6.3-litre Ginetta G55 had a clear

run thereafter, chased by Doug Watson's Ferrari 458 Challenge and Bennett.

Jordan Curnow (Honda Civic) and Chris Southcott (Peugeot 205) shared Hot Hatch honours. Curnow spun exiting one of the chicanes in the second race, but battled back to third behind Tim Adams's similar Civic. Tony Cooper (Peugeot 106 GTI) and Darren Duffield (Mini Cooper S) topped their divisions on both outings.

MARCUS PYE

THE CUP RUNNETH OVER

A stunning array of GT3 and GT4 machinery, successful international Pro racers and sell-out grids – all during a pandemic. There's no shortage of reasons why the GT Cup is faring better than ever

STEPHEN LICKORISH AND STEFAN MACKLEY



HAWKINS

International sportscar racing aces Darren Turner, Oliver Webb, Adam Carroll and Jon Lancaster are among the drivers. Four Lamborghini Huracan GT3s are due to take part in the season opener, plus a further three Super Trofeo machines. Then there are seven GT4 McLarens, and GT3 cars from McLaren, Nissan and Mercedes. No, this is not a top-level European or even worldwide GT series being discussed, but instead the entry list for this weekend's first round of the GT Cup at Donington Park.

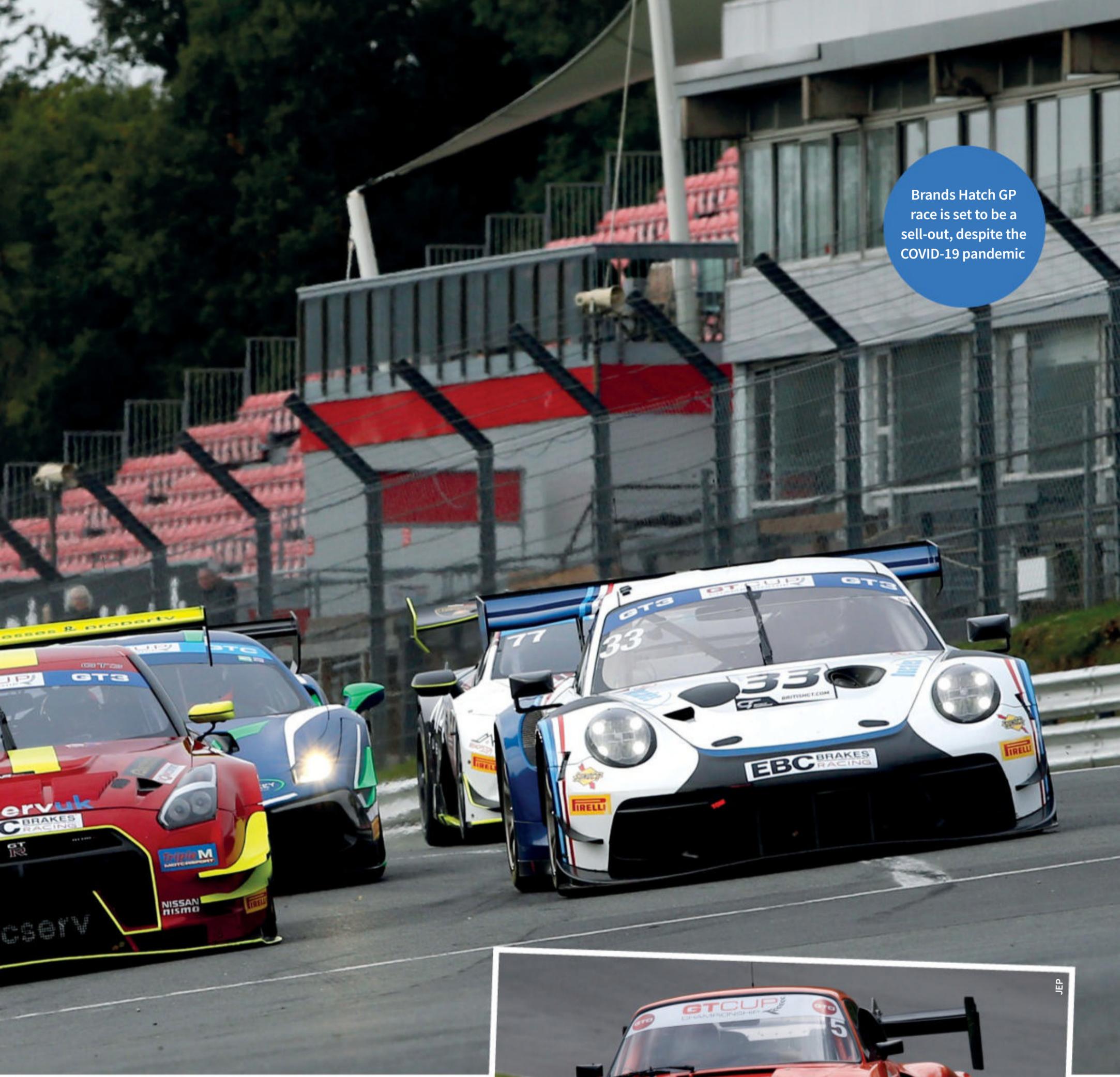
It's quite a remarkable collection of cars and drivers that makes up the 38-strong field set to do battle in Leicestershire. And it gets better – for the Brands Hatch Grand Prix round in May, a capacity 46 entries have been received, and there are eight reserves! Considering we are still in the middle of a pandemic, with wide-ranging economic implications, and these are hardly the cheapest cars you can go racing in, it makes the achievement all the more impressive. The COVID-19 restrictions may well have played a small part in the strong entry, as competing in Europe is now not an option for many, but the success the GT Cup is enjoying in 2021 is down to a number of key factors.

"I don't think it's any one thing – we've been working really hard over the past three or four years to bring GT Cup to where it is now," says championship director Hannah James. "We've made a big investment in staff and on the media side, and we've brought some things in-house. We've worked really well as a team and it makes a difference."

"We're still that friendly championship that people want to come and race in. Our grids for this year are just incredible – I think the last time we had grids like this was at the A1GP at Brands in 2009, which was 42 cars."

As well as the impressive line-up of drivers and cars, the series has attracted support from several of the leading manufacturers. McLaren, Aston Martin and Ginetta are all set to bring support teams or trucks to help assist customer operations. And Carroll, who will be driving a McLaren 570S GT4 for the new Greystone GT team alongside GT racing rookie Mark Hopton, believes the pandemic has helped the championship in another way.

"I think in general, and not just in motorsport, people just want to start getting back to some sort of normality and having



Brands Hatch GP race is set to be a sell-out, despite the COVID-19 pandemic

"WE'RE STILL THAT FRIENDLY CHAMPIONSHIP THAT PEOPLE WANT TO COME AND RACE IN"

some fun," he says. "That's what a lot of guys want to do it for – they've been working extremely hard for most of their lives and want to go and have fun."

The sheer number of people wanting to have fun in the championship this year has, however, posed some challenges for organisers. "Having such big grids means we've split the pitstop times," explains James. "For safety reasons, we've got two groups – each with five minutes to pit – and they will then swap [order] on the Sunday. I'm really looking forward to it and it's really exciting. We should be putting on quite a show and we've got a live TV stream for all rounds. I think it's going to be a good year."



Chamberlain's Porsche has been a regular for many years

James describes Donington as featuring a "pretty spectacular line-up", but stresses that attracting the star Pro driver names is not what the championship is all about – instead the 'gentleman racers' are very much the focus. She says it's important that the Pros remember "this is a gentleman championship and they're there to support and coach the gentleman drivers. We're not about the Pros; we're a friendly championship."

That's reflected in the format over a race weekend. There is a huge amount of track time and much of that is geared towards the amateur drivers. Each day there's a 15-minute warm-up, a 15-minute qualifying session and a 25-minute sprint race, »

CLUB AUTOSPORT GT CUP'S BIG GRIDS

before the 50-minute pitstop contest. Carroll believes this makes it the perfect learning environment for those new to racing and wanting to progress up the ladder, as they become used to dealing with lapped cars and completing driver changes.

"GT Cup is a great series for people who are starting out racing because of the track time you get," he says. "For the Ams and gentlemen drivers, by racing with different cars, you get up to speed with traffic management. The guys are going to really enjoy themselves and learn at a very fast pace. GT Cup gives you a proper taste for racing and what you can do out there."

But, while the aim of the game is helping to coach their less experienced co-drivers, Carroll insists there will also be plenty of competition among the Pros. "I've done quite a bit of GT Cup over the years and I figured out pretty early on it was surprising who turns up!" he says. "You can have three or four really quick Pros in cars and it's absolutely flat-out racing."

Despite the category being at the top end of the national racing scene, the camaraderie that can so often be found in club motorsport is very much present in the GT Cup paddock. "If someone has an off and damages their car, you can guarantee there will be teams that will be running in and helping them, offering parts to get that car back out on the grid," says James.

That friendliness means there is no shortage of competitors who return year after year, whether it's Richard Chamberlain in his brilliant orange Porsche 935 or Warren Gilbert in his Marcos Mantis. This season, Gilbert is swapping to a Lamborghini as he continues to race alongside customer Jensen Lunn, while the other Topcats Racing Marcos will be driven by Gilbert's wife, team co-owner Charlotte. She's no stranger to the circuits, and competed in British GT and TVR Tuscans in the 1990s, before being lured back after what was supposed to be a one-off drive last year.

"I was never really challenging for any titles, and then you end up stepping away from racing when you have family and the business to run and things like that," she says. "Then I don't really know what happened. Something triggered in me and I was only meant to do the Silverstone round [last year], and I think once you've got back into it then that sort of inspires you to carry on again."

She believes the diverse range of GT machinery in the series is one of its key selling points, especially with the increasing numbers of latest-specification GT3 beasts. "I think it does

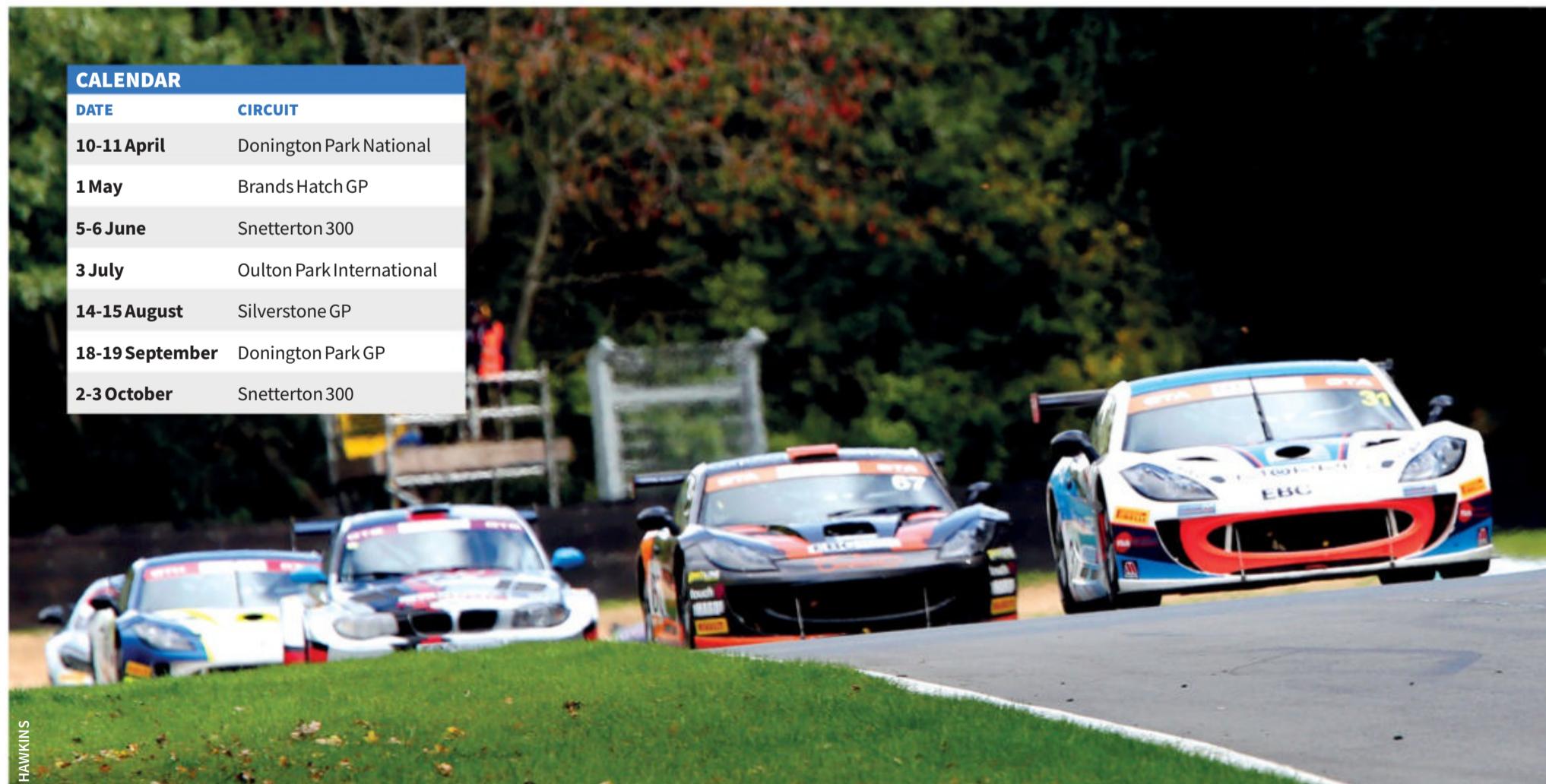


JEP

add to the prestige of the championship, and if you want it to be maybe a feeder into British GT or something, it's a good step up," says Gilbert. "You've got the Chamberlain Porsche, which is really old but it's really heavily engineered. I mean, our car isn't original – the Marcos isn't fully original underneath. We've built it to be really strong and to take the power – they're designed to compete with the more modern machinery."

Last year's season finale marked the 100th GT Cup event since the series was founded by Bute Motorsport in 2007, and the shift to an increasingly high percentage of current cars is one of the most noticeable changes during that time. "I think that's down to costs," says James, who has been part of the championship throughout. "Some of the older cars have become difficult to get parts for and I believe some of the manufacturers are offering quite spectacular deals, which come with spares packages, which makes a difference. It's not cheap to run a McLaren GT4, but this is where these guys want to be doing it. But we've still got two Marcoses and do have the older machinery."

One type of machine you do not see on the grid is saloon cars. The series has stuck to the principles of its late creator, Marc Haynes, and – unlike many other endurance categories – has continued to be exclusively for GTs. "There's a place





Carroll is among the star names and will race Greystone McLaren

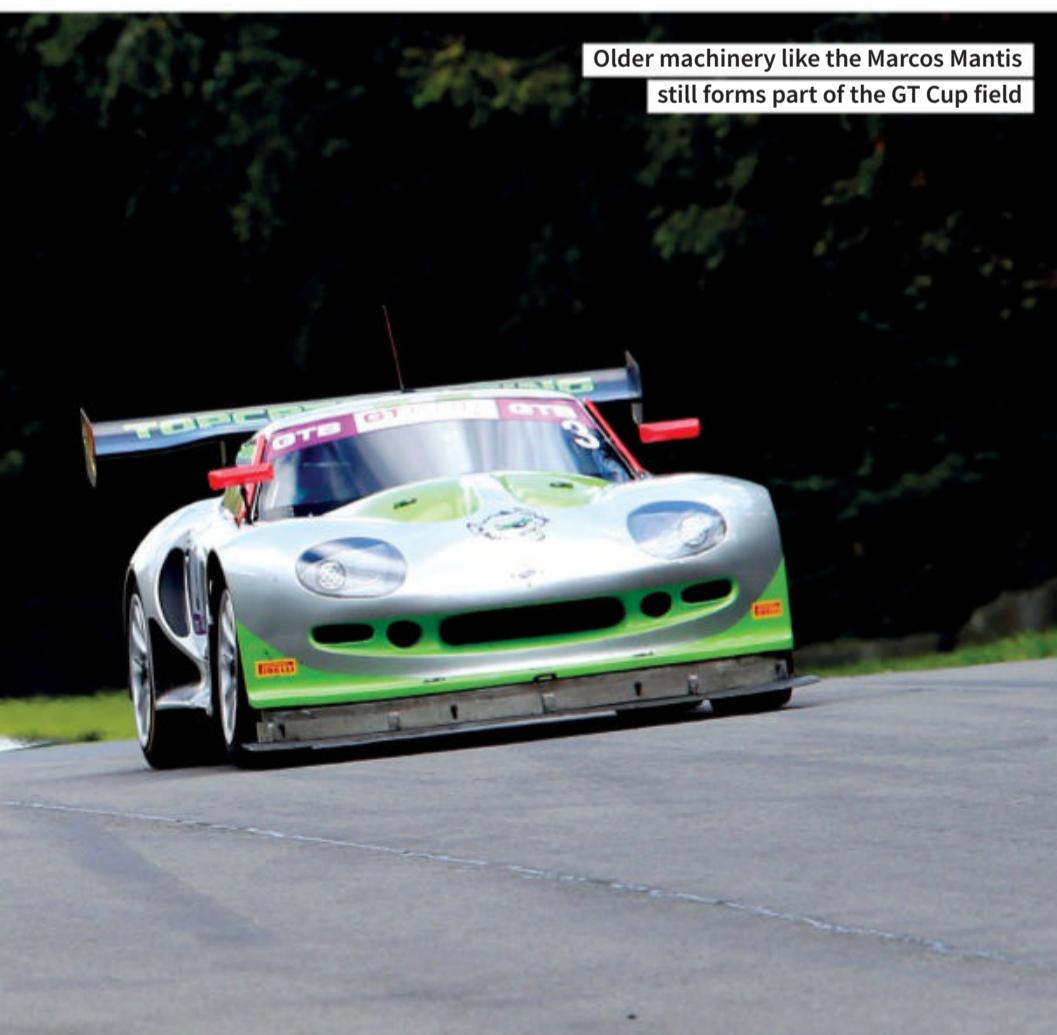
for everybody with a GT car," adds James. "We've no intention of going down the touring car route — we're always about GT cars. That was Mark's goal and that's how we see it.

"People come and race with us, learn and move up to British GT and the World Endurance Championship, and we find they come back to us on the way back down. That's where we see ourselves. We're there to have fun, we're there to help people learn and teach them their craft, but everybody is welcome."

The series also continually looks at its regulations and consults with competitors to see if any changes need to be made. One example was the recently introduced sprint challenge standings for the amateur-only shorter races. Another goal on the horizon is to add an overseas round, although the pandemic has inevitably put that on hold.

"Eventually, I would like to create our own GT Cup package where we have other championships that come with us throughout the year," continues James. "That would help with cost savings, we could share TV costs, and would work together and have a big awards ceremony at the end of the year. That's something we've strived for."

The entry list for this weekend's opener is proof that the GT Cup is certainly on the right track. ■



HOW THE GT CUP'S CLASSES STACK UP

The GT Cup currently has six classes, or groups, that cater for slightly different GT machines. Here's a rundown of what they are and some of the notable entries in each.

GT3

The newest addition to the class structure does not take much explaining — it's for fully homologated GT3 machines. Among this entry are a number of British GT pairings looking to get in some early-season running, including Phil Keen and Michael Igoe (Lamborghini Huracan), Stewart and Lewis Proctor (McLaren 720S) and Richard and Sam Neary (Mercedes-AMG). Other entries are set to feature W Series racer Abbie Eaton and 2017 GT4 champion Will Tregurtha.

GTO

This is another class that is easily defined by its name as it's for open-specification GT cars, including older GT2 or GTE machines. It is home to Richard Chamberlain's famed Porsche 935, while other entries for Donington Park this weekend include a Brabham BT62 and a Radical RXC.

GTC

The GTC group is when things begin to get a little more complicated. The official description for this is "later model year Challenge and Cup specification cars". What that means in practical terms is more recent cars from various one-make GT categories. The Donington class entry is populated by Lamborghini Super Trofeo machines, one of which is being piloted by former World Endurance GTE Am champion Stuart Hall.

GTB

Here is where you find some of the older machines on the grid, including the two Marcos Mantises. GTB is for "early year Challenge and Cup cars", and the Donington field also features some older Porsche Carrera Cup cars as well as early-specification Aston Martin Vantages.

GTH

Another fairly recent addition to the ranks, this is where the homologated GT4s compete. This is comfortably the best-subscribed class for Donington with 11 entries, which include McLarens, Astons, a Mercedes and a Porsche Cayman. It is in this division where many of the top Pro names can be found.

GTA

The final class caters for older, lower-powered GT cars, and the majority of the Donington entries are Ginetta GT4 Supercup-spec G55s. Just because this is, in theory, the bottom rung of the GT Cup's class ladder doesn't mean it warrants any less attention, particularly as last year's overall champions Joshua Jackson and Simon Orange (below) came from this group.



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A CLEAR MESSAGE THROUGH THE SAUDI ARABIAN DUST

TV COVERAGE

EXTREME E

Entertainment, equality, environment – the three Es that encapsulate what Extreme E stands for were highlighted as the innovative new off-road all-electric championship took its bow last weekend following months of build-up and fanfare.

The Desert X-Prix, the first of five rounds of Formula E co-founder Alejandro Agag's latest enterprise, took place in the AlUla region of Saudi Arabia with a contingent of motorsport's elite, including teams from Formula 1 world champions Lewis Hamilton, Jenson Button and Nico Rosberg, as well as high-profile drivers such as nine-time World Rally champion Sébastien Loeb, World Rallycross star Timmy Hansen and inaugural W Series champion Jamie Chadwick.

It seemed fitting, then, that the coverage of last Sunday's main event wasn't tucked away on some obscure TV channel, but instead had a primetime slot on terrestrial television with a one-hour showing on ITV1, as well as appearing on the BBC's Red Button. BT Sport 1 and Sky Sports Main Event also showcased the new series during the weekend.

The fact that the coverage was made available across a number of channels, and mainstream ones at that, means the FIA-sanctioned series and its message is likely to grab the interest of not only seasoned motorsport veterans but also those completely new to the sport. But what of those three Es mentioned at the start of the show?

There was certainly no lack of entertainment in the qualifying and semi-finals, which included many thrills and spills that were recapped briefly at the beginning of Sunday's programme. Sadly, the same couldn't be said of the final. With more dust than expected (yes, even for the desert), the format had already been tweaked days before the event to make it safer for drivers. Regardless, zero visibility for chasing cars meant the trio of Odyssey machines in the final were separated by 30-second intervals almost from the beginning.

After that, the efforts of seasoned commentators Andrew Coley, Jennie Gow and Karun Chandhok to stoke some enthusiasm into the 11-and-a-half-minute race was always going to be a tall order, but the knowledgeable trio did shed light on different aspects of the category, including the 'Hyperdrive' power boost and the 'GridPlay' public vote.

The in-house production itself was complemented





by a plethora of information, from a car's speed and torque, to where it was on the course, via neat graphics and mini pop-up boxes.

The camera angles included onboard shots – which unsurprisingly were of limited use given the amount of dust – but without doubt the highlights were the expansive aerial shots, with miles of desert and stunning rock formations stretching into the distance, showcasing the incredible scenery.

Plenty of interviews were scattered throughout the programme, which will only help to bring less established drivers, such as race winner Molly Taylor, to wider public attention. This is where equality comes into the mix, with each crew required to have a male and a female driver as part of its line-up.

But the most significant E for Extreme E is without doubt the environment and the 'bigger picture'. It's no secret that the mission of Extreme E, by competing on different continents and in diverse climates, while also leaving behind a legacy programme, is to highlight the damage being done to the planet. The production doesn't hold back in repeating this message. It's to be expected, and was just on the right side of being insightful rather than feeling like holier-than-thou rhetoric being rammed down your throat, but only time will tell if that remains the case throughout the remaining rounds.

Original ideas are hard to come by, but there's no question that Extreme E's novel approach could bring in a new wave of fans, and perhaps even make a difference to the planet.

STEFAN MACKLEY

YouTube

youtube.com/AUTOSPORTdotcom



Could the Mercedes W12 be the second strongest car of 2021? The smart money is on Red Bull's RB16B to be the faster of the two this season thanks to a combination of rake set-ups and the new floor regulations hurting Mercedes the most. Autosport looks at how Merc's low-rake configuration might now be its biggest hindrance.

Go to bit.ly/MercPain

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Formula E

Round 2

Rome, Italy

10-11 April

TV Live BBC 2,

Sat 1445, Eurosport 2,

Sat 1430, Sun 1130.

Available via BBC Red Button, iPlayer and BBC Sport website

Ferrari Challenge

Europe

Round 1/7

Monza, Italy

10-11 April

Livestream on

Motorsport.tv, Sat 1520,

1635, Sun 1350, 1505

Super GT

Round 1/8

Okayama, Japan

11 April

NASCAR Cup

Round 8/36

Martinsville,

Virginia, USA

10 April

TV Live Premier

Sports 2, Sun 0000

NASCAR Xfinity Series

Round 7/33

Martinsville,

Virginia, USA

9 April

UK MOTORSPORT

Oulton Park CSCC*

10 April

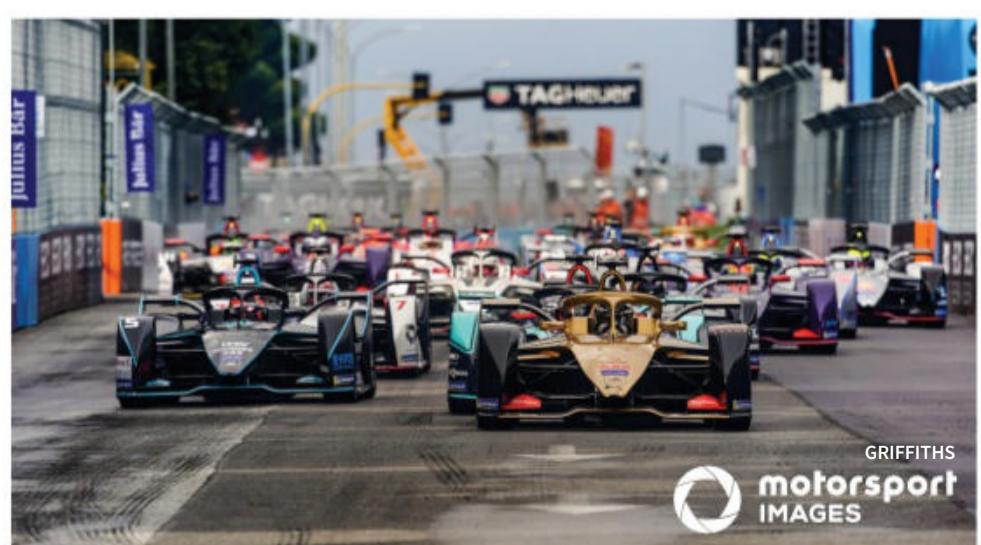
Future Classics, Magnificent Sevens, Modern Classics, New Millennium, Open Series, Swinging 60s, Tin Tops, Turbo Tintops

Donington Park MSVR*

10-11 April

911 Challenge, Clubmans, GT Cup, Monoposto, MSVT Trackday, Porsche Club, Sports 2000

*Behind closed doors



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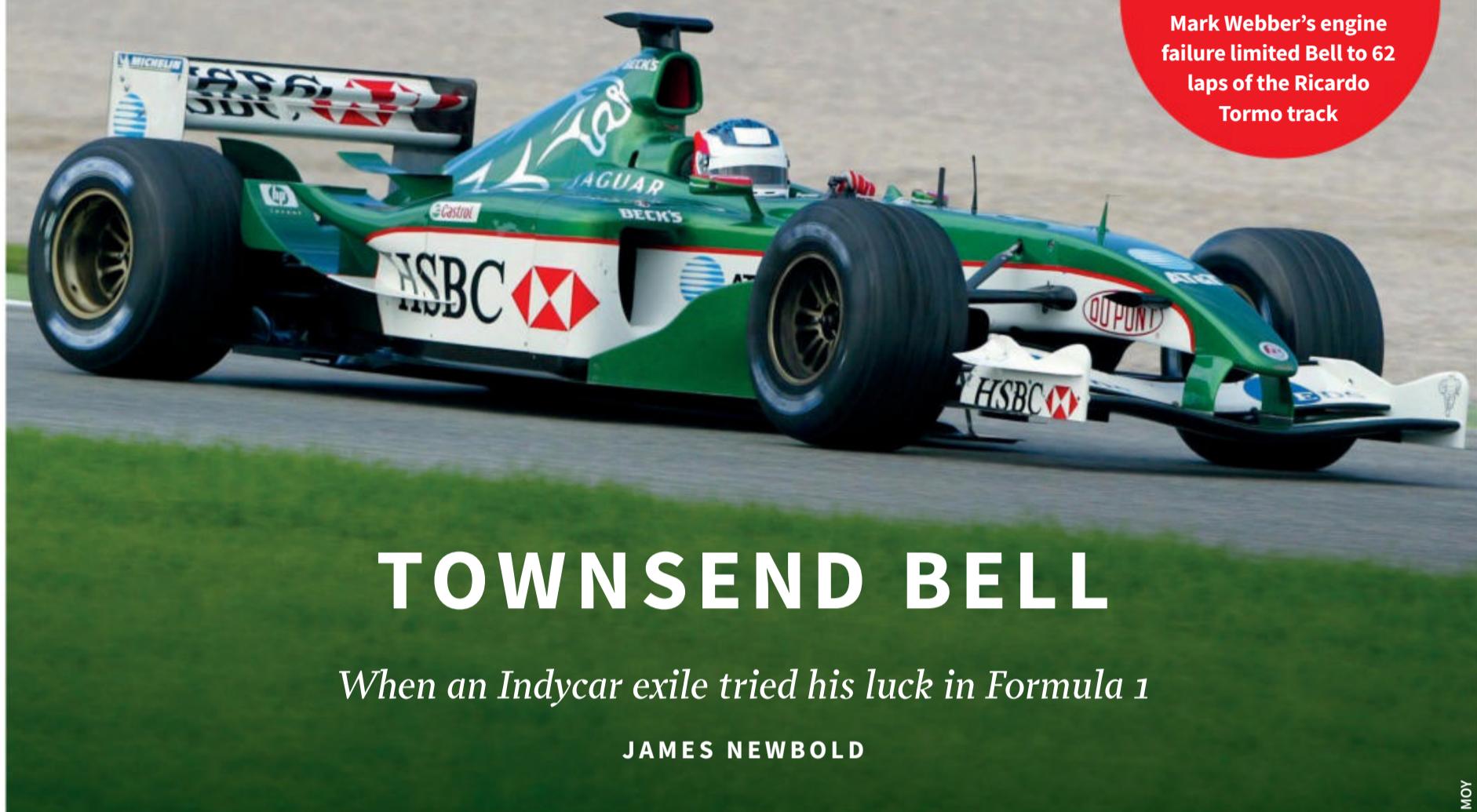
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THE FORGOTTEN TALES OF ONE-OFF OPPORTUNITIES

STAT
62Mark Webber's engine
failure limited Bell to 62
laps of the Ricardo
Tormo track

TOWNSEND BELL

When an Indycar exile tried his luck in Formula 1

JAMES NEWBOLD

MOY

An unlikely sequence of events led Townsend Bell to sample a Jaguar Formula 1 car at Valencia in November 2003.

Bell had won the 2001 Indy Lights title, and made his CART Indycar debut before the end of that year. He seemed destined for a long career at the top level of US open-wheelers, but after a scrappy half-season in 2002 with Patrick Racing he found himself on the sidelines facing a career crossroads.

At the age of 27, Bell moved to Oxford and signed a two-year deal with the Arden team in the International Formula 3000 championship. With no circuit knowledge, he was always going to be up against it – “I didn’t have a spectacular rookie season,” he admits – and, with money for a second year tight, he set his sights on a third-driver role at an F1 team for 2004.

“I knew it would be unrealistic to go

straight into a race seat,” says Bell. “But given the amount of testing that factory-backed teams were doing, they needed either a full-time test driver or, in the case of BAR, a second full-time tester.”

Bell had impressed BAR in straight-line aero testing and had a full test lined up with the Ford-owned Jaguar squad after his marketing guru father-in-law, the late Rod Campbell, made some introductions. “I leaned in really heavily with ‘I’m the only American that is even remotely poised to be in a Formula 1 team on some level,’ ” Bell says, “and I managed to convince the Ford people to give me a chance.”

Bell describes the test as “a baptism by fire”, not helped when an engine failure delayed his running until after lunch. He soon realised he was “frankly unprepared for the demands on my neck”.

“It just felt like you were in a feather with 1000 horsepower,” he says. “The g-force was a great magnitude higher than what I experienced in Indycar and F3000. It was a completely different world.”

Bell admits he “started to black out in one of the corners” on a low-fuel run in the late afternoon and, as his field of vision decreased, the inevitable happened: “I went off and got stuck in the gravel. They hauled me out, but at that point I was done.”

He feels his times were reasonable for a rookie, but he had to bring money to



Bell struggled with
g-forces on his neck

**“IT FELT LIKE YOU WERE
IN A FEATHER WITH
1000 HORSEPOWER”**

Jaguar for a third-driver role and was gazumped by F3000 team-mate Bjorn Wirdheim. His F1 hopes were finally dashed when a boardroom change at BAR owner British American Tobacco meant Brazilian Enrique Bernoldi was preferred.

His European adventure at an end, Bell returned to US open-wheel racing, taking fourth in the 2009 Indy 500. He went on to forge a successful GT career that has to date yielded class wins at the Le Mans and Daytona 24 Hours, plus an IMSA class title. ■



A spate of incidents led to
early exit from Patrick Racing



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Competing for space among the characteristic French floral street furniture, the Aston Martin DB3Ss shared by Reg Parnell and Peter Collins (#25), and George Abecassis

and Roy Salvadori (#26), are primed and fettled ahead of the 1953 Le Mans 24 Hours (the #27 car driven by Eric Thompson and Dennis Poore is also just visible in the background). None of the works trio made the finish: the

Parnell/Collins car crashed out two hours in, Abecassis and Salvadori were eliminated when oil leaked into the clutch after 10 hours, and Thompson and Poore lasted a further eight hours before their engine died.

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IN DEFENCE OF...

SHORT RACE TRACKS

It's easy to wax lyrical about Nurburgring's Nordschleife, the majesty of the Isle of Man TT or the old Spa road circuit – and rightly so. But I believe the appeal of the world's shorter race tracks should not be overlooked. In fact, they should be celebrated far more than they are.

I'll begin with a track close to my heart. Nobody was happier than I when the local track of my youth, Oulton Park, reopened its full layout for cars. While the International Circuit's driving challenge is superior, I have to admit, on the evidence of the hundreds of races I've watched there, that the finest racing that sticks in the memory has more often been served up by the shorter, sub-two-mile Fosters layout.

A friend of mine, Steve Jones, recently posted his video of the 1983 British Formula 3 bout that became famous for Ayrton Senna parking atop Martin Brundle's head (above). Steve had captured every lap of their duel from Fosters, and it was fascinating to watch the gap ebb and flow between them, and just a tiny mistake had a huge consequence in their

duel. Reduce the number of corners and it magnifies their importance.

Shorter tracks are better for fans too, because you can see far more of the track from one vantage point – Brands Hatch Indy, Knockhill and Mallory Park are great examples where you can see almost the entire track from a couple of spots.

Shorter tracks don't tend to feature the kind of tight corners or chicanes that act as pinch points to string out a field. Sure, Brands and Mallory both have hairpins, but their flowing nature elsewhere allows for slipstreaming to cancel that out. Imagine a Formula Ford Festival on the Brands Hatch Grand Prix track. I think it would be pretty rubbish compared to the Indy circuit thrillfests we've enjoyed down the years.

And is it really coincidence that the track that played host to the greatest Formula 1 duel of all time, between Gilles Villeneuve and Rene Arnoux at Dijon in 1979 (inset), was at a track barely over two miles in length? I rest my case.

CHARLES BRADLEY

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

Can Mercedes sort its W12?

THE CHALLENGES FACING THE REIGNING CHAMPIONS



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Autosport, ISSN number 0269946X, is

published weekly by Autosport Media UK Ltd,

1 Eton Street, Richmond, TW9 1AG, United

Kingdom. Airfreight and mailing in the USA

by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet

Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor,

Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage

paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. Subscription records

are maintained at Autosport Media UK Ltd,

1 Eton Street, Richmond, TW9 1AG.

Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.



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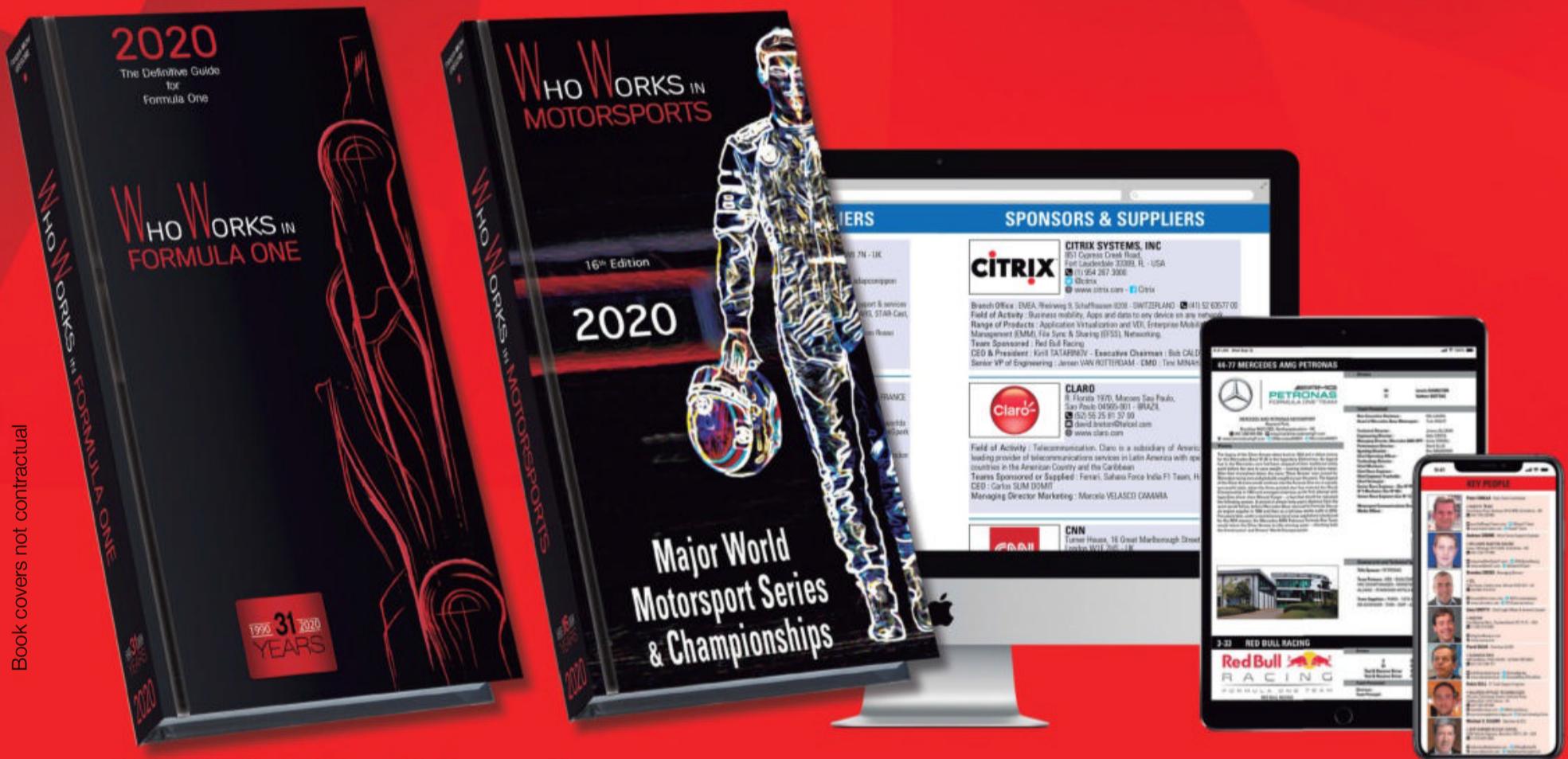
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